

Anime Fantastique

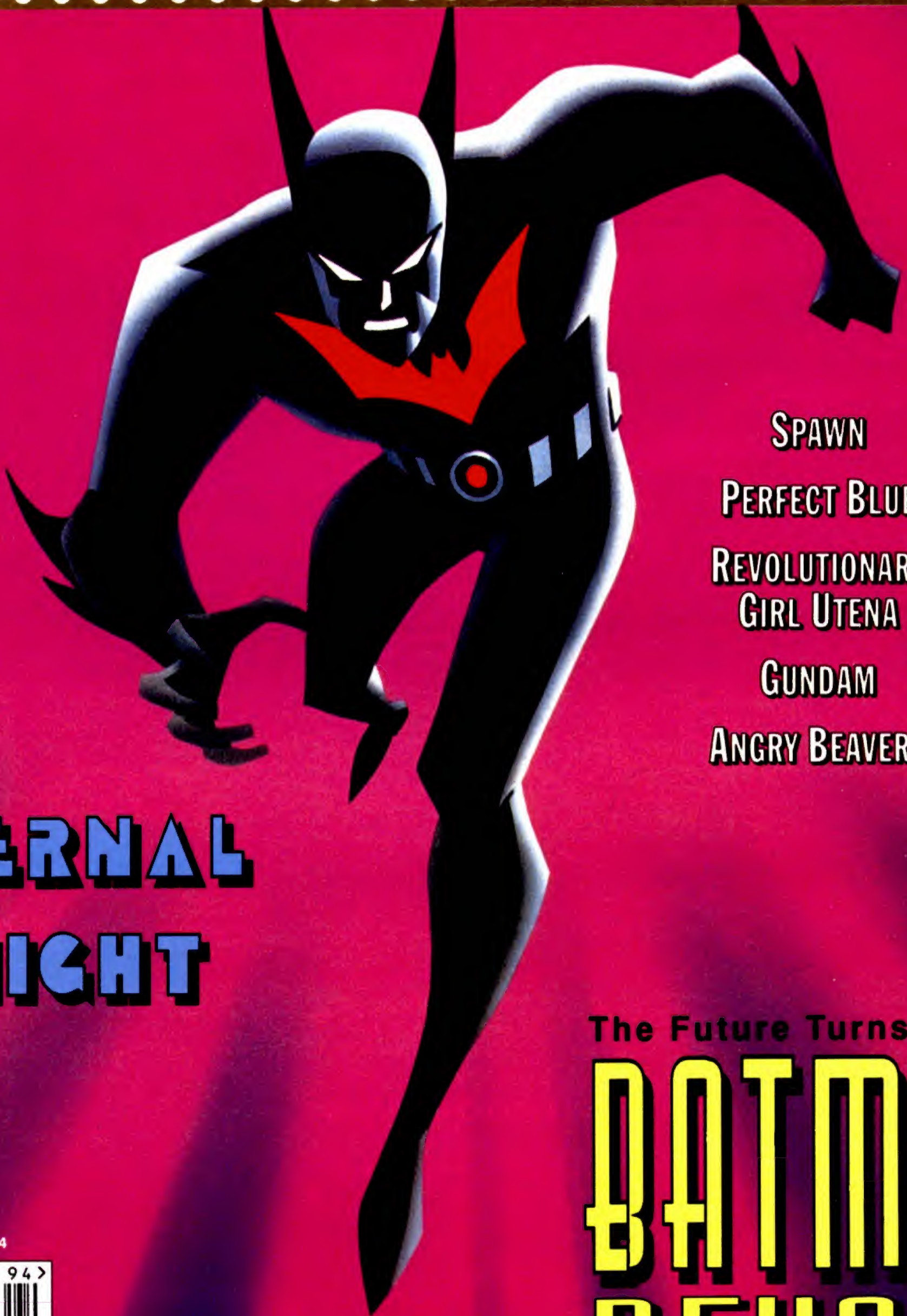
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SPAWN

PERFECT BLUE

REVOLUTIONARY
GIRL UTENA

GUNDAM

ANGRY BEAVERS

ETERNAL
KNIGHT

The Future Turns Dark In

BATMAN
BEYOND

Volume 1 Number 4



94 >

THE FIRE

THE HEART

THE SOUL

THE LIFE

A.D.V. FILMS PROUDLY PRESENTS:

BUBBLEGUM CRISIS

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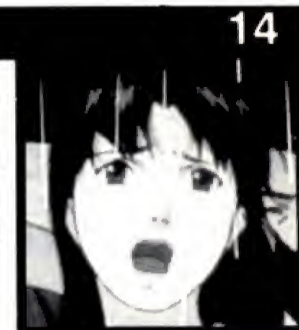
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David Hughes talks with Todd McFarlane about three seasons of dark super-heroics, and explores the tenuous future of HBO Animation.

PERFECT BLUE

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All pop star Mima wanted was to grow up. All her fans wanted was to freeze time. **Paula Vitaris** explores how the brutalities of life in the public eye have been transformed into a landmark, anime thriller.



IRON GIANT

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Singing princesses didn't do it for Warner Bros, but maybe a robot fallen to Earth will. **Mike Lyons** looks into Brad Bird's quirky, Fifties-tinged comedy/adventure, and traces the career path that led Bird to his role as potential savior of Warner's animation.

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How do you follow up the best anime series ever created for American television? You rejuvenate your hero, revamp your rogues gallery, and kick the whole thing into a high-tech, if characteristically ominous, future. **Dennis Fischer** talks with the Dark Knight's guardians, details the high and low points of the first season, and explores how past heroics tie in with future adventures.

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This ain't the same ol' shojo. Get past the storms of rose petals and the frequent costume changes, and you'll find a supreme mix of action, drama, and surrealism. **L. Jagi Lamplighter** digs beneath the surface of this intriguing and addictive anime series.

GUNDAM

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The fans built the model kits, and the model kits built the series. **Michael O'Connell** recounts the history of a show as legendary for its growing pains as for its innovative approach to drama.

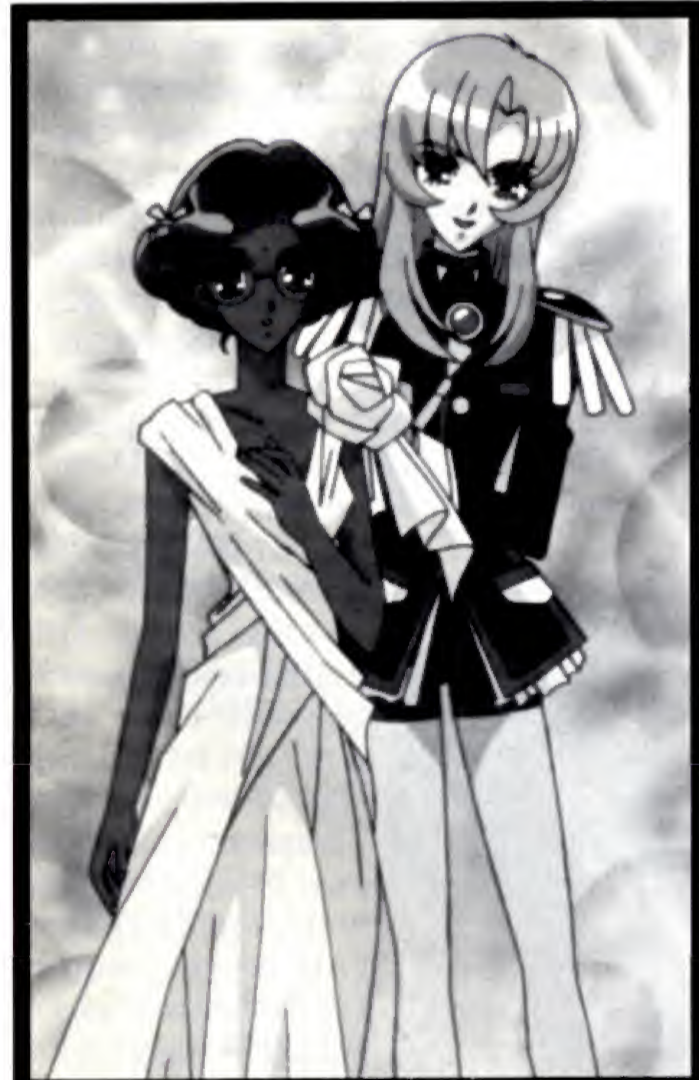


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Well, they're more weird than angry, but what's wrong with that? **Mitch Persons** talks to creator Mitch Schauer.

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Publisher: Frederick S. Clarke. **Editor:** Dan Persons. **Tokyo Bureau:** Hiroki Kakihisa. Contains 100% of the recommended, daily requirements of **Contributors:** Marina Frants, Dennis Fischer, Todd French, Russell J. Handelman, Miwa Hirai, David Hughes, L. Jagi Lamplighter, Eric Lurio, Mike Lyons, Michael O'Connell, Mitch Persons, Paula Vitaris. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Elaine Fiedler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington.

Publisher's Assistant: Lisa Coduto. **Circulation:** Faith Redding. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: ADV Video; Bandai Entertainment/AnimeVillage.com; Central Park Media; Nickelodeon; Software Sculptors; Studio Ghibli, Warner Bros.

THANKS TO: Larry Tetewsky, Jeff Thompson, Steve Pearl, Scott Mauriello, Todd Dissinger & all the folks at Otakon

ANIMEFANTASTIQUE (ISSN 1521-7205) is published quarterly at 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. (708) 366-5566. E-mail: mail@cfq.com. Second class postage paid at Forest Park, IL 60130 & additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to ANIMEFANTASTIQUE, P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303. **Subscriptions:** 4 Issues \$20. (Foreign & Canada: 4 Issues \$23 Single copies: \$8. **Retail Distribution:** In the U.S. by Eastern News Distributors, 250 W. 55th St., New York, NY 10019. (800) 221-3148. **Submissions** of artwork and articles are encouraged, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Contents copyright ©1999 by Frederick S. Clarke. **ANIMEFANTASTIQUE** TM is a proprietary U.S. Trademark. **PRINTED IN THE USA**, so you know it's fresh!

Okay, let's not waste any time with this. I'm a strong believer in the Band-Aid approach to breaking news: one quick yank; get it over with. Brace up, kid, this'll be easy. Ready? One, two, three... This will be the last issue of *AnimeFantastique*. The market hasn't been as supportive of our efforts as we had hoped, and so we're pulling the cord before more money goes down the drain.

There, now, that didn't hurt, did it?

Well, yeah, it did, at least for me. One of the advantages of being the editor of something like *The Fen-Phen Journal* or *The Ricky Martin Gazette* is

that when that type of faddish magazine folds after two or three issues, you can wipe your hands, shrug your shoulders, and move on to *The Ferret Weekly*, or whatever. But *AnimeFantastique* was never meant to be a fad magazine, and I'm not "pro" enough to take these things

in stride. My emotional commitment to what we were trying to do is too deep to make me forget that we had our chance and, somehow, blew it, righteously.

Both Fred Clarke and I thought the time was ripe for a magazine that would finally unite eastern and western animation, and do it with the quality and enthusiasm that *Cinefantastique* has become famous for. That may have been a misjudgment. The hows of our miscalculation would probably not be of interest to you, and the whys I'm still trying to figure out. I have theories, the results of some of which you'll see applied in this final issue. Would it have made a difference if I'd realized these things sooner? Maybe. At this point, such

conjecture is clearly moot.

I'll tell you one thing, though: however *AFQ* has failed, it was not for lack of quality. As a member of the *Cinefantastique* Magazine Group, we had the advantage of having access to the *CFQ* writing stable, a group of journalists whose dogged determination and love of genre filmmaking knows no equal. I had the additional fortune of supplementing this core group with writers whose knowledge of and passion for animation was at least the equal—and more often the better—of mine. Turn back to our masthead, squint up your eyes, and check out



the names there. For whatever asshole ego-trip I'm permitted to indulge on this page, these are the people who really made the magazine happen. Put it this way: if I had one wish for the world, it would be that every person enjoy the feeling I regularly had when I'd download a submission, open up the file, start reading, and say to myself, "This is so...fuckin'...good."

My thanks to all our contributors; you made this gig a breeze. I also need to thank my publisher. For all the nightmare scenarios that I could have dreamed possible, Fred Clarke did his level best to make sure none of them came true. He was there when I needed him, kept his distance when I didn't, and support-

ed my decisions every step of the way. The greatest Hell, to my way of thinking, would have been to en-



ter into something like this, and then to be so compromised in my judgement that I couldn't regard the finished product with pride. Fred didn't let that happen—admirable behavior, especially for one whose money was riding on the venture. My gratitude, Fred, and I only wish I could have returned the favor by making this a going concern. It didn't happen this time, but that doesn't mean it won't happen sooner or later. Believe it or not, I still

consider the thesis behind *AnimeFantastique* to be valid: that a synthesis is in



progress in the animation world, one that will see western animators taking further advantage of the expanded boundaries first explored by the Japanese. Upcoming titles suggest it—OSMOSIS JONES,

SPIRIT OF THE WEST and TV's adaptation of Kevin Smith's *CLERKS*, point the way to a wider palette of animated subject matter, and the growing acceptance by western audiences of animation as a filmmaking medium as open and flexible as live-action. One day, someone else will try a magazine that brings together the full spectrum of world animation, and that

person will either have the wisdom to include the one, special element that we somehow missed, or the fortune to introduce his publication at a time when the general public is primed for it. When that magazine succeeds, I'll at least have the satisfaction of knowing that we at *AFQ* got there first, and, at least for four issues, were able to show the world the shape of animation's future.

Yeep, I'm starting to slip down the ol' rabbit hole of my own grandiose ambitions. Best tactic at this point is to beat cheeks before some wise-ass cues up "My Way" on the CD and makes me feel like a real

dork. Before I go, though, let me just thank you, the readers, for coming with us on this unfortunately truncated journey. I hope we've given you at least a few minutes of entertainment, some striking insights to mull over, and ultimately an appreciation of the

exciting frontier that animation has embarked upon. For whatever it's worth, it's been fun. Now get outa here, ya nuts. I've got a magazine to stop publishing.

Dan Persons

AFQEditor@aol.com

AFQ

IS IT ON TIME AND DOES IT SUCK?

ERIC
LURIO

"Story doesn't matter...there are only about seven of them anyway."

— Richard Williams

It was June of '98 when I heard the master make those remarks. I was taking his New York City seminar — most of it had to do with something he was the best in the world at: the subject of craftsmanship, the mechanics of animation. He was very detailed and endlessly fascinating. He also did some reminiscing about his life and art. He showed us a film he did in the early '60s called *LOVE ME LOVE ME LOVE ME*, one of the greatest cartoons ever to come out of the British Isles.

He dismissed it out of hand. The animation was minimalist, he said, and the only reason it was popular was because of the writing. He seemed to really resent that, for some reason.

Williams spent 30 years on and off working on a film called *THE THIEF AND THE COBBLER*. There is a mysterious tape of a so-called "workprint" making the rounds of the video underground, and I've seen it. The animation is extraordinary, the best ever done. But it's an awful movie. Something important is missing. The story.

Consider the artwork on the old *ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE* show: extremely limited animation made by under-

paid Mexicans who aren't trying very hard. Yet these shows are quite rightly considered classics, animation gems. It is clear that great writing can mask bad animation, but not vice versa.

They had Disney's *SLEEPING BEAUTY* on the Disney channel the other week. This is another example of the importance of story. As a movie, this is one of the weakest of the numbered features. The characters are one-dimensional, the plot uninteresting and there is only one decent song. But the animation was some of the best ever done by the studio, which is why its reputation is so high. Far more enjoyable was Hanna-Barbera's *QUICKDRAW McGRAW* which had craftsmanship almost as bad as Jay Ward's *BULLWINKLE*. But

the writing was great.

I'm not saying that good craftsmanship isn't desirable. On the contrary, that is what saved *PRINCE OF EGYPT*. But that film actually had a halfway decent script in parts and made a genuine attempt at characterization — something *THIEF AND THE COBBLER* or *SLEEPING BEAUTY* didn't do at all.

Which brings us to the current crop of films. Take *THE KING AND I* (please). What this film does is violate the intent of the original authors: Richard Rich jettisoned what the story was about, and shoehorned the admittedly wonderful music into a preformed mold that really hasn't worked for years. If a script is really bad, you begin to notice the bad animation, making it all

the worse.

Another problem is cliché. Sometimes clichés can work, but it's a difficult maneuver to pull off. You need spectacle, a roller coaster ride to take one's mind off the plot and character deficiencies. Which is why *RUGRATS* made a mint, and *DOUG'S 1ST MOVIE* didn't make back its advertising budget.

Much the same thing goes for television. *THE PJS* works, because the characters are more than one-dimensional stick figures and it's clear that the creators of the series like and care for Thurgood and his missus. *FAMILY GUY*'s characters, on the other hand, are mainly ciphers on which to hang on jokes (that could change — I've only seen two episodes). That kind of soulless gag-factory might work in a seven-minute short, but it doesn't gel in a longer format (especially if the jokes aren't all that good).

The main lesson of the animation boom that began in November of '96 is that the offerings have to be good TV and movies first, and animation second. You can't just fit everything into a prefab mold and just assume everything's going to come out decent.

Disney learned this lesson before anyone else did. We'll just have to see if Warners, Fox, and all the others who follow will one day catch on.

AFQ

THE SCRIPT BEFORE THE CELS: No one ever held *ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE* (below, now seen on the Cartoon Network) up as a shining example of seamless animation, yet the ascerbic writing of Jay Ward and company has turned the series into one of the art's bona-fide classics.



GOLDEN CITIES AND FREAKED CHICKENS: DREAMWORKS BUILDS FOR THE FUTURE

Okay, so DreamWorks can walk the walk and talk the talk. Not only was *PRINCE OF EGYPT* an impressive debut, it was what other animation studios weren't doing. Now come the next set of challenges: overcoming the sophomore slump, and proving that DreamWorks won't be just another body left in Disney's wake.

The studio has enough planned to see them into the new millennium, each project designed to continue DreamWorks' mandate: to further expand the boundaries of animated subjects, to prove that this is a medium suitable for any audience, and to show that, as animation moves into a new age of aesthetic and technical innovation, its potential is only as limited as the imaginations of those who create it.

THE ROAD TO EL DORADO

Taking a cue from the old Hope and Crosby "road movies," this film, set in the 16th century, follows two con men, Tulio (voiced by Kevin Kline) and Miguel (Kenneth Branagh), who stowaway on a ship bound for the New World and end up discovering the fabled Lost City of Gold. Armand Assante provides the voice of the film's villain, while Rosie Perez is the sultry leading lady.

Directed by Eric "Bibo" Begeron and Don Paul (head of effects on *PRINCE OF EGYPT*), *THE ROAD TO EL DORADO* will feature songs by "THE LION KING duo," Elton John and Tim Rice. Carrying a light-hearted tone, this film is filled with more opportunities for the fantastic, along with a character design that is decidedly more stylized and "cartoony." Early animation and artwork from the film shows that the DW artists must be



ESCAPE FROM EXTRA-CRISPY: A strategic alliance has netted DreamWorks *CHICKEN RUN*, the eagerly awaited first feature from the clay animation masters at Aardman. Mel Gibson provides star power as the voice of renegade rooster Rocky.

releasing a huge sigh after the more rigid and constraining viewpoint of *PRINCE OF EGYPT*. The film is due in theatres in March of 2000.

CHICKEN RUN

Billed as "THE GREAT ESCAPE with chickens," DreamWorks teams with the acclaimed Aardman Animation studio (the Wallace and Gromit shorts) for this all-stop-motion feature. The film tells the tale of a British chicken, named Ginger, and an American rooster, Rocky, who lead a desperate bid for freedom from the chicken farm before they all wind up on dinner plates.

CHICKEN RUN will feature the voices of Mel Gibson as Rocky and British actress Julie Sawahla as Ginger. Co-directing are Peter Lord (co-founder of Aardman) and Nick Park (three time Academy Award winner), who have consigned themselves to a grueling schedule to meet their release date.

In addition to the fact that *CHICKEN RUN* will mark Aardman's first foray into features, after many successful years in shorts and commercials, what has many in the industry talking is the fact that DreamWorks outbid major rival Disney for the distribution rights. It's

scheduled for June, 2000.

SHREK

The second collaboration between DreamWorks and Pacific Data Images (ANTZ), this computer-generated film takes its story from the popular children's book by William Steig, about an ogre who will do anything to get his swamp back. Austin Powers himself, Mike Myers, stars as Shrek, taking over for his friend, the late Chris Farley. Also starring: Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz and John Lithgow.

The film, directed by Andrew Adamson and Victoria Jensen, is due for Christmas, 2000.

SPIRIT (Working Title)

How about a western told from the perspective of the horses? In the film, set during the mid-1800's, a mustang struggles for survival and freedom in a harsh, human world. Adding to the challenge: *SPIRIT* will tell its story without dialogue.

Early, evocative storyboard and conceptual art recalls the naturalism of *BAMBI*, coupled with the realism of such live-action films as *NEVER CRY WOLF* and *THE BEAR*. *PRINCE OF EGYPT* story heads, Kelly Asbury and Lorna Cook will direct the film, which is due in 2001.

TUSKER

From small to large, PDI and DreamWorks move from the world of *ANTZ* to this tale of pachyderms. The computer animated film tracks a herd of elephants, who come up against marauding poachers during their trek across Southeast Asia. Tim Johnson (who co-directed *ANTZ*) and Brad Lewis direct. No release date has been set.

APQ

RETURN TO INNOCENCE: MIYAZAKI PLANS HIS NEXT PROJECT

DAVID
HUGHES

Although it is now two years since Hayao Miyazaki's landmark feature *MONONOKE HIME* (U.S. title: *PRINCESS MONONOKE*) was released in Japan, progress on the director's next big title has been slow. While Disney busies itself with the international release of *MONONOKE*, and is rumored to be recovering from a ruinous handling of the *LAPUTA* dub that saw the loss of the film's music and effects track, Japanese fans are already looking forward to Miyazaki's next film, said to be in the planning stages at Studio Ghibli.

"What Miyazaki really wants to make now is a film for children; he's planning a film with a ten-year-old girl as the heroine," said producer and studio chief Toshio Suzuki, adding that the character is based on a real girl. "Her name is Chiaki, [and] she's the ten-year-old child of someone we know, so we really want to make a film that appeals to her." Miyazaki himself admitted, "I'm still waiting for the idea to take final shape. Right now I have three pieces from here and here and here, but I still have to find the other pieces."

One thing Japan's most popular director is certain of, however, is that the film will have the same realistic qualities as the rest of his films. "The difficult thing about presenting stories for children is not a question of setting them [in] a fantastic and wonderful environment," he said. "It's how to set

them along the path of becoming a better person. "When times are good," he added, referring to the declining standard of living in his native Japan, "people don't tend to think about such moral questions as the best way to live our lives. It's when times are becoming hard that those questions can be asked."

Miyazaki also hopes to make good on his ambition to animate the stories of Arthur Ransome, author of the British children's classic *Swallows and Amazons*. "If the opportunity ever arose, I'd love to make an animated series based on those books," he said. "I love Ransome's world — peaceful, carefree summer holidays in a lovely countryside. One day I hope to go to the English lakes and see that wonderful landscape for myself," he added, fondly recalling the two trips he made to North Wales while researching *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY*.

Whatever Miyazaki's next project might be, fans of Studio Ghibli can look for-

ward to more computer-based animation — used for the first time to enhance *PRINCESS MONONOKE* — in Ghibli's upcoming *MY NEIGHBORS THE YAMADAS*, which combines the studio's more traditional animation techniques with computer-controlled watercolor washes. "The subject is a very tender one," Suzuki said of the film, which looks at the increasing globalization of the world through the eyes of an average Japanese family. "That's why we decided to use those soft watercolor washes. We spent almost a year and a half inventing the technique of how to fade watercolor washes in the computer," he added, proudly. "We can reach a level with these computers that we couldn't reach before."

INCOMING

Fans of Agent Aika, whose *NAKED MISSION* proved a hit for U.S. Manga Corps earlier this year, will be both heartened and disappointed to learn that her final OVA adventure, *FI-*

NAL INVASION: THE DELMO BASE, was recently released in Japan. Expect a U.S. release early in the New Year.

MIMIC director Guillermo del Toro looks set to bring *AKIRA* creator Katsuhiro Otomo's three-part manga *Domu* — the tale of a schoolgirl and an elderly man using psychic powers to battle a demonic skyscraper — to the big screen. The project had previously been considered as a live-action prospect by writer-director Darren Aronofsky, and as an animated feature film by Otomo's protege Satoshi Kon as a follow-up to the Otomo-supervised masterpiece, *PERFECT BLUE*. Kon is now said to be considering filming *PERFECT BLUE* author Yoshikazu Takeuchi's follow-up, *Simple Red*, which concerns another teenage pop star looking to legitimize and expand her career by becoming... a voice actress for anime films.

Finally, after the successful makeover of *BUBBLEGUM CRISIS*, producers AIC have announced that its successful spin-off, *AD POLICE*, will shift the action to the year 2039 A.D., a year before the events of the current *BC* series. The show will follow the exploits of a rapid-response, RoboCop-style unit named Takeru Sasaki. A deal was expected for U.S. distribution, probably via ADV Films or U.S. Manga Corps, before the series hit Japanese screens in April. APQ

OUT OF THE FOREST: Another, less feral, child protagonist is on the boards for Hayao Miyazaki's follow-up to *PRINCESS MONONOKE*. But who she is and what she'll do still remains a mystery.



SPAWN AGAIN

The third season may well have been the last.

Not just for Todd McFarlane's tortured avenger, but for HBO Animation itself.

Before HBO Animation turned Todd McFarlane's hellish comic book creation, *Spawn*, into a late-night anime series, you could count the number of U.S. produced animated shows aimed solely at an adult audience — rather than those aimed at kids but with crossover appeal — on the fingers of one hand. MTV's *AEON FLUX* had already proven that adult animation could work, but it was the 1997 debut of *SPAWN* — the six-part series which, along with *SPICY CITY*, launched HBO Animation — which marked the greatest investment in a series whose violence, profanity and overall tone made it unsuitable for transmission during daylight hours. Luckily, *SPAWN*, the show *and* the character, feels at home in the darkness.

SPAWN began as the comic book creation of former *BATMAN* and *SPIDER-MAN* artist Todd McFarlane. He had left Marvel to set up his own company, Image Comics, in 1992, and within a year found himself with a third share of the U.S. comics market. His success was based on

by DAVID
HUGHES

the popularity of a single character: a former government assassin known as Al Simmons, who returns from a five year sojourn in Hell to become *SPAWN*, a foot soldier in the ongoing war between Heaven and Hell. "Earth is the battlefield, human souls the prize," the assassin is told, as he struggles to come to terms with his new life. This is no easy feat — with his beloved wife, Wanda, already remarried, and his hideously disfigured features keeping him out of daylight, his sojourn on Earth is as much a netherworld as the inferno which sired him.

"Even though he has these incredible powers," McFarlane said of his creation, "he's still trying to figure out (a) what they are, and (b), what good are they? Am I gonna use [them] for personal gain? Am I gonna try and help people? Am I gonna become a bad guy, give in to the dark side? It's just about a man trying to deal with his life." Or rather, his life after life.

Debuting on HBO on May 15, 1997, the animated *SPAWN* assembled an impressive voice cast, led by Keith David (*THE THING*) as *SPAWN*/Al Simmons, and featuring Richard Dysart (*L.A. LAW*), Ronny

Cox (*ROBOCOP*), and James Keane (*DICK TRACY*). Behind-the-scenes, the talent was equally impressive: *THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BATMAN* producer/director Eric Radomski was supervising director; HBO Animation Vice-President Catherine Winder, formerly producer of *AEON FLUX*, acted as producer; Alan McElroy and Gary Hardwick adapted McFarlane's comic books for the screen; Jack Fletcher (*AEON FLUX*) oversaw voice direction. Creator and executive producer McFarlane had the final say over all creative aspects — a fact even he finds a little surprising: "It was kind of odd that [HBO] put me in charge," he said. "I knew nothing, really, about animation, [but] I asked the questions and learned along the way."

The first six episodes of the animated *SPAWN* were more successful than their ratings might suggest; if anything, the series' impact may have been diminished by the almost simultaneous release of the critically reviled live action feature film. Nevertheless, partly thanks to the success of the two different video versions — one unedited and unrated, the other re-formatted with a PG-13 rating — HBO Animation com-



missioned a further six episodes to air early last year. That, said McFarlane, was when the problems began. "Ninety percent of episodes seven through twelve were essentially rewritten from head to toe," he revealed, adding that time pressures meant that this was often done after the animation had been completed. In other words, he said, "We had to work with the visuals and the structure of the stories, but essentially rewrite everything."

In fact, although he was more closely involved with SPAWN's animated incarnation than he was with the live action movie, McFarlane was one of the series' most vocal critics. "I think we can add more mood to it," he told *Cinefantastique* after the first six episodes aired. "I think we can add more atmosphere. I know we can fucking make those backgrounds a hundred times better. I think we can refine what's there..." McFarlane feels that he was successful in giving the second series a "darker, edgier" feel, but that the scripts lost some of their focus. Now, as SPAWN goes into its third series of six half hour episodes, will it be a case of

third time's a charm? "These next six stories have a new writing team on them, that we brought on because [last year] I was getting so frustrated," McFarlane enthuses. "Starting with [episode] 13, and continuing through 18, the stories are actually being done by the collective whole of us, where we actually went, 'Okay, cool — this is the story we want, and here's the voice we wanna give it.' So unlike the second set of six [shows], there is always a consistent voice, in terms of story and visuals."

With much of the original story arc having been resolved in the last episodes of the second series — as SPAWN/Simmons finally confronts Wanda with the terrible truth about his existence — series three provided the perfect opportunity for a grassroots rethink. "In the next six, we've gotten away from the fantasy stuff a little bit," said McFarlane, "and gotten into more urban realism." Although all of the principle members of the voice cast return for series three, McFarlane and Jack Fletcher have turned the caliber of guest performers up a few notches: Eric Roberts (DOCTOR WHO),

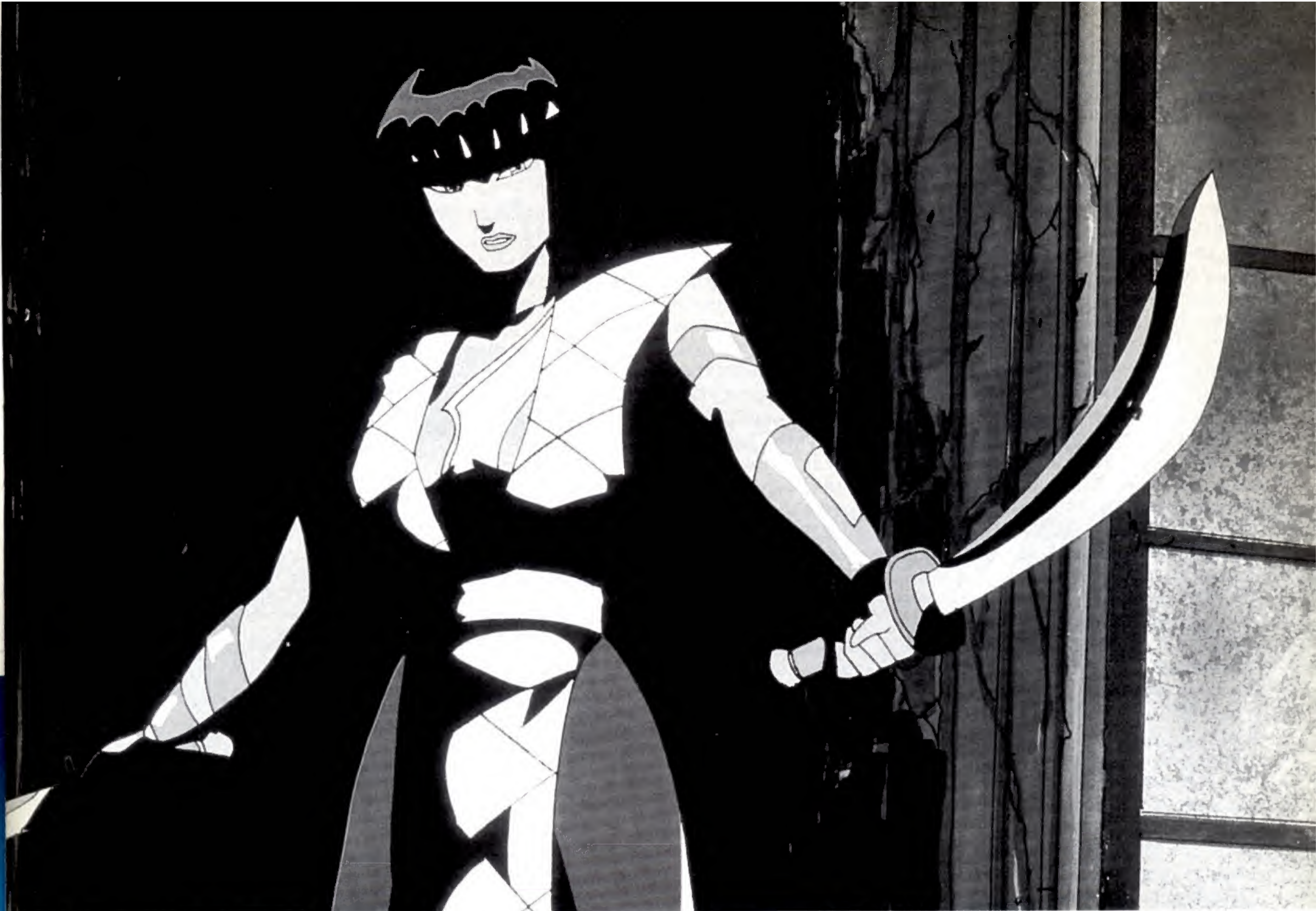
Robert Forster (SUPERNOVA) and Jennifer Jason Leigh (THE HUDSUCKER PROXY) are just three of the well-known actors lending their voices to supporting characters this season.

According to McFarlane, the first episode of the new series centers on four college buddies who get into trouble when a prank goes wrong; panicking, they wind up in the alleyways of Rat City, SPAWN's adopted home, where things soon go from bad to worse. "That leads us into a story that shows that Spawn had these same troubles when he was young," McFarlane explained. "It's one of those things where you say, 'There but for the grace of god go I — I've been with these kids before.' [You're] messing around in the back seat of their car on a Saturday, and you make a wrong turn, or somebody says the wrong thing or has one too many drinks, or gets hot to the wrong guy... And all of a sudden, the evening ends in a place you never thought you'd go."

In addition to the more realistic storylines — which will also play down the in-



KICKS AND MAKEUP: The SPAWN universe keeps expanding, with raunchy demon Clown (above) coming back for more "fun," and new adversary Jade (upper right) thrown into the mix.



volvement of SPAWN's nemesis, Clown — McFarlane said that there will be a greater emphasis on character development. "The one thing you'll see in series three — and I don't know if it's good or bad, we'll have to wait for the results — is that we're trying to go for more drama and suspense instead of pure action, because I believe that the longevity of SPAWN is gonna come from having characters that people care about. Of course, we'll continue to do cool stuff, but cool stuff doesn't necessarily mean bazookas and big guns, you know what I mean? That can lose its flavor very quickly.

"The thing we're trying to do is write these kind of cool, odd stories that tie in together, so people are involved with them, and you want to see what's going to be the end result of all that, and narratives start to intertwine deeper and deeper, so that by the end of the next six, SPAWN is set free to go out and be a full-scale bogeyman, if you will."

McFarlane openly admits that the new direction he and HBO Animation are taking with the animated SPAWN is all part of his ongoing "master plan" to ensure that the seven-year-old character on which the Image Comics empire has been built will endure well into the next century. "I'm trying to build a franchise here," he said, "and I believe that, as time goes by, it needs to

have a consistent voice, because I think that makes it easier for you to accept SPAWN for the next 20 years." Refreshingly, McFarlane claims to be firmly against the criteria used to sell comic book characters such as BATMAN, where the limits of how far you can go are dictated by the fact that very small children follow the exploits of the character, and are therefore potentially vulnerable if it moves into adult areas. "What if BATMAN wasn't owned by corporate America, and didn't worry about whether or not it was okay to put him on pajamas? Then I think he'd act a little more like SPAWN." In fact, McFarlane believes that if a comic book character's appeal is principally to an older audience, that is the market to which it should be targeted, as with the animated SPAWN. "You don't see car companies building cars for six-year-olds," he points out. "They just wait till people are adults to sell them cars."

In other words, the animated series is not the only aspect of the SPAWN phenomenon which will be aiming to appeal to a more sophisticated, adult audience. "What [that audience] is looking for is what we're actually gonna be putting into the movie sequel, which is going to be R rated," he said of the live-action SPAWN sequel currently being developed by New Line. "The first movie basically became our entry point, but

now the audience is older, we've got to start turning up the heat on them, right? To me, the sequel is going to be a lot closer to what SPAWN is in my mind and always has been."

That is not to say that McFarlane does not think that the readers who have followed SPAWN's comic book escapades since 1992 are not an important element of his overall audience. "I've had to be very patient about getting people on board and doing a bit of a 'bait and switch,' if you will," he said, "growing them into it like I've grown with it, so they go, 'Wow, as we get older, SPAWN gets cooler!' Because if I get you at 20, I might keep you for thirty years, but if I get you at seven, I'll be lucky if I get you till 14 — and I'd rather have you for 30 years than seven! So, hopefully, SPAWN will become this cool kind of underground, cult thing that will just live for 20 years, like Michael Myers in HALLOWEEN. As I get older, I'm more interested in [mature] stuff — it's more intelligent, more sophisticated, and given that our market is getting older, I think it's what people are going to grow into. And more importantly, I think it's something you can take outside the walls of comic books, and that's real important."

In addition to the animated series, the live-action SPAWN sequel, the computer

games, toys, and countless other licensed products, McFarlane said that Image Comics will diversify into other products which he hopes will help to ensure the longevity of his most popular character. "We're starting to increase our publishing arm [by] doing *THE CROW* and some other odd books," he said, "things that are more like urban drama than comic book fantasy. We're also doing something with Sam and Twitch, the two detectives from *SPAWN*, but it's gonna be more like a *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* style story. It's gonna be about serial killing, and dirty cops, and the politics of being on the police force, trying to keep the mayor happy, and how all that falls out. I keep telling people I want 'anti-comics,' and what I mean by that is that if it can work in a Superman comic book, I don't want it."

But with Marvel in bankruptcy, and only the triple threat of *Batman*, *Superman* and *Sandman* keeping DC Comics alive, is there a future for the comic book medium itself? "I think the medium of comics will always have a place somewhere," McFarlane states with admirable conviction for a man who has seen sales of the *SPAWN* comic plummet from 800,000 per month in 1992 to 120,000 per month, with no immediate sign of stopping. "I could see a day where comic shops completely go out of business, but it doesn't mean there won't be comics — it just means that necessity becomes the mother of invention, right? So maybe all of a sudden you're buying your comic books when you're buying a carton of

milk... In terms of where we are right now, obviously we're still in a downward swing, and I personally don't believe that there's any upward swing in the foreseeable or even near future. I've been saying that for years."

McFarlane describes the dwindling comics industry as a vicious circle: the market shrinks, so retailers go out of business, which means fewer comic book stores, which means fewer comic books. "The problem is, [most companies believe that] as the market shrinks, you need to raise the cover price. But if people weren't buying it at a buck, why are they gonna buy it at two bucks? And then if they can do multiple covers and gouge the public, then they'll do that. A lot of people will tell you I'm greedy, but the facts tell you the opposite: I started Issue 1 of *Spawn* at \$1.95, and six years later, it's still \$1.95 — yet the costs of printing have more than doubled in that time, while my sales have gone down." According to McFarlane, even those on the creative side are not beyond reproach. "They just want to hit a home run and leave," he said. "They don't want to put in any longevity or do any body of work. Some of the young kids in the industry

think they can come in and be hot, and as soon as they're hot, they go make a deal for an animation show, and turn their backs on comic books, and then they find out that Hollywood isn't necessarily their friend, either, and when they come back, they're damaged goods."

Nevertheless, for all his diversification into other fields, McFarlane refuses to turn his back on the comic book industry — especially in its hour of need. After all, if he



IN LINE FOR PROMOTION: *SPAWN*'s third season adventures (right) live on in the recently released, home video edition. Meanwhile, odd-couple detectives Sam and Twitch are being groomed (a full-time occupation, no doubt) for their own comic series



does not take the medium into the next century, who will? "Somebody has to be a bit of a martyr, right?" he laughs. "But I'm only one voice, one comic book, and one character, and I can't stop this machine if it wants to destroy itself — it's gonna do whatever the hell it wants to do! What I can say is that I'm gonna survive because I've diversified: I've got the toys, the animation, the movies, and so on. And as long as there is a market, there will be an Image Comics, even if there is only one book out there, and that's called *Spawn*. Even if there's just this lone lunatic in the corner putting out this book and only selling five copies of it, black and white — *Spawn* is gonna be around forever."

ATQ

SPAWN

HBO Animation

The fledgling studio scored points for innovation, but nevertheless might not be long for the world.

As a first venture into animated television, SPAWN was only a moderate success for HBO; even its potentially lucrative video afterlife was unspectacular, despite the canny packaging of each set of six episodes into two animated "feature films" suitable for a PG-13 audience. Unfortunately, this means that the future of HBO's fledgling animated division is in jeopardy, and several of the other shows commissioned by the cable network will never see the light of day.

One of the most intriguing unseen pilots produced by the SPAWN team was *GEENA AND T.L.*, based on a series of poetry volumes by Joffe Farr. Describing the tale of a Generation X couple desperately in love with each other but also desperately dysfunctional, *GEENA AND T.L.* would have had an all-star voice cast, led by Jennifer Jason Leigh (*EXISTENZ*) as Geena and Flea (*GEN 13*) as T.L. Said voice director Jack Fletcher, "It had a beautiful animation style — something I hadn't seen before, with a lot of live-action backgrounds that were very reminiscent of a lot of the earlier [work of] Ralph Bakshi. It was just a wonderful project — we had excellent dialogue tracks recorded with Jennifer Jason Leigh and Flea, but we only got to a very advanced 'animatic' [stage]."

Another HBO project unlikely to be broadcast was a proposed series based on Peter Cooper's comic book, *WILD SIDE*. "I really responded to Peter and came up with a great cast," explained Fletcher, "and it felt like it was going to go, but

then there were some serious shifts in focus, and things were put on hold for a while. Then the options ran out, which basically meant that it wasn't going to happen. I understand why, I suppose, but it's a shame."

Attempting to explain the reasons behind HBO's changing attitude toward animation, Fletcher said, "I think HBO is now politically changing their system so that they're not going to be as involved in adult animation as they used to be. I can't really speak about what the specifics are, why they've changed their focus. One can only assume that finance has something to do with it; that to start up your own animation studio and to get the kind of quality that they were getting was maybe costing them more than they liked. When you are taking your first foray into the world of animation, you have in your mind what it needs to look like and what it needs to do as a show, and you may be surprised when the bill comes. It costs a bottom line of a particular amount of money to get a particular look, and the look and feel of SPAWN is so exacting, visually, that the shows are not cheap to make."

Peter Chung, whose MTV-financed series, *AEON FLUX*, arguably spearheaded the recent, adult animation explosion, said that the under-performance of HBO Animation's early efforts have almost certainly doomed the division. "Shows like SPAWN and *SPICY CITY* are ratings disappointments, [and] I think HBO is winding down and will probably cease animation produc-



A JOB TOO WELL DONE?: SPAWN's adult-oriented storytelling may not have been enough to insure the longevity of anime on HBO.

tion after the remaining, ordered SPAWN episodes have been finished." He added that he sees this as a general trend in terms of future animated shows aimed at an adult audience. "I predict a narrowing of the mature animation market, at least for TV [and] cable pro-

grams. Recently, when it comes down to ratings, animated comedies are hits — *THE SIMPSONS*, *KING OF THE HILL* and *SOUTH PARK* — so we can expect more animated comedies in the future, which I have no interest in making."

David Hughes

PERFECT BLUE

When a pop star grows out of her image,
will the fans drag her back in?

by PAULA
VITARIS

Something obsessive this way comes, and with luck, it'll be coming to a theatre near you. This August, Manga Entertainment released Rex Studio's superbly written and animated psychological thriller, **PERFECT BLUE**, an official entry at numerous international film festivals and winner of both the Best Animation Film at Fantasporto 1998 and the Public Prize for Best Asian Film at Montreal's Fanta-Asia 1997. Manga plans to "platform" the film, giving it a summer debut in New York, and then rolling it out to all major, U.S. markets in the coming months.

An adaptation of a novel by Yoshikazu Takeuchi, **PERFECT BLUE** is scripted by Sadayuki Murai and directed by first-time director Satoshi Kon. Its protagonist is Mima Kirigoe, a young singer and leader of the popular girl-group Cham. The story opens with Mima at a turning point: although Cham has a loyal and vociferous — if small — following, Mima feels that her career is stagnating. At the urging of her manager, Takadoro, and his associate, Rumi, Mima decides to quit the group and embark on an acting career. Takadoro swiftly lines up roles for his client, all low-profile, secondary spots on TV shows. Seeking to break his protegee out of her rut, the manager accedes to having Mima appear in a simulated, but still brutal, rape scene.

The fans who had loved Mima as the sweet, innocent front person of Cham are

distressed by the emotionally scarred characters she now plays. The unthinkable happens: Someone starts murdering the people who had promoted Mima in her career, and Mima discovers an internet site called "Mima's Room," created by an obsessed fan who seems to know not only her every move, but her very thoughts. Mima's life unravels even more when visions of her mini-skirted, pop-singing self begin to haunt and taunt her. Who is the murderer? Is it Mima? The crazy fan? As the actress searches for clues, the borderline between her real self and her stage self grows dim. **PERFECT BLUE** screws all these elements up to an almost unbearable pitch, finding only temporary release in such controversial scenes as an appalling murder by ice pick that goes far beyond what anyone would expect from an animated film. But **PERFECT BLUE** is not just a murder mystery; it is a serious exploration of a young woman struggling to establish her identity despite the demands of celebrity and a career that calls for her to be anyone but herself.

PERFECT BLUE is the first directorial effort from Satoshi Kon, previously known for his work with anime pioneer Katsuhiro Otomo and for his writing and scenic design for the "Magnetic Rose" segment of Otomo's **MEMORIES**. Born in Hokkaido, Japan, Kon studied visual communication design at Mushashino Art University. After graduation in 1986, he became a cartoonist, winning attention for his work in manga, notably **KAIKESSEN** and **WORLD APART-**

MENT HORROR. This led to a job in anime, where he became a scenic artist and layout artist for Otomo's **ROJIN Z**.

On the strength of his "Magnetic Rose" segment for **MEMORIES**, as well as his work on the fifth episode of the video series **JOJO NO KIMYOU NA BOUKEN**, Kon landed the directing assignment for **PERFECT BLUE**, an assignment bolstered by the whole-hearted support of his mentor, Katsuhiro Otomo. "Katsuhiro Otomo made me want to start drawing," Kon said. "I was a big fan of his since high school. I was attracted by his realistic drawing skills, which are different from the symbolic style of manga. He did not imitate styles from other manga; he drew the real world. Not only was it symbolic, but he also had eyes sharp enough to see inside things. I learned the foundation of realism from his work. In addition, I learned the importance of how I should relate to the object and how I should see the object. I do not imitate how he draws, but I learned how I could draw in my own way by looking at his work and talking with him." Although Otomo served as a "special advisor" to **PERFECT BLUE**, Kon said he did not actually see Otomo during the making of the film. "During production, I did not receive any advice from him," Kon stated. "I accidentally met him at a bar during the production. He told me, 'It's a cool script!'"

Kon also credited artist Osamu Tezuka, whom he called "the father of manga," for introducing him to manga and anime.

Kon found directing to be a natural step



SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE: When pop idol Mima decides to step away from her role as frilly front person for the group Cham, she sets the stage for the fracturing of her own psyche in Satoshi Kon's dark suspenser, *PERFECT BLUE*.

from drawing. "I was a cartoonist. I wasn't aware of being a director. It's other people who care about the title. To me it is all the same, no matter the title. Even if I mention that I want to create a film, I don't expect to direct. To direct, you need to have the technical knowledge of animation. I learned this technique by doing background design — scenic art — and layout design. I learned team work, which is the most different aspect of anime from manga."

According to Kon, the idea to turn *PERFECT BLUE* from a novel into an anime came from its original author, Yoshikazu Takeuchi. Kon received a rough outline and found it to be a fairly unambiguous story. "I first thought, *This is not my style*. 'An abnormal fan attacks a popular pop star, because the fan can't take the image change in her career.' It was a simple story, it had a lot of bloody scenes, and was more of an action/horror story than what it eventually became. When I received this offer, I was very busy working on a serial manga, but when I met the producer and the original writer, they promised to allow me to change the story. Also, being a director for the first time was too good [an opportunity] to miss. That's how I decided to get involved."

PERFECT BLUE's script, written by Sadayuki Murai, a television writer who received Fuji TV's Young Scriptwriter's Award, went through three drafts, with Kon suggesting changes after reading the first draft. But story development didn't end with the completion of the script. "In animation, storyboarding is an important process," Kon said. "When I was working on the storyboard, I changed the scene and the dialogue. The entire process took about three years, including a year and four months to create the scenic art, storyboard, animation, and sound."

Although *PERFECT BLUE* is a thriller and a murder mystery, at its core lies a coming-of-age story for Mima, as she moves from being controlled by others (her managers, her fans) to self-awareness and self-control. "The confusion of the growing process is the main theme," Kon affirmed. "There are three stages of her growth: destruction, confusion, and construction. Mima changes in three steps. The first Mima can't decide anything by herself; she is a childish, immature character. She can only have confidence in herself when people flatter her. That Mima is destroyed by mov-



ing from pop star to actress. And although I say 'destroy,' changing her career is her desire, too. The second step — confusion — was the most important part of this story, as she moves from the stage, which gave her some stability, to the new world of acting. It is the same as a student leaving school and starting work. Mima's confusion is increased by her fans' reactions and the crimes happening around her. The confusion ends when she meets herself in the past [facing the image of her pop star double]... Facing it, fighting it is the 'construction' part. In this last part, Mima gains stability again. But she probably will have to go through other trials in the future. In the last scene of the film, Mima says into the mirror: 'I am the real one.' This is a hint that this is not the end of her story."

Mima's gaze into the mirror is the central image of *PERFECT BLUE*. Mima sees her reflection — or sometimes her taunting, pop star double — in mirrors, windows,

computer monitors or broadcasts from television and video screens. The constant doubling is unnerving, especially when the reflection suddenly transforms into a doppelganger, an image of Mima in the girlish, pop idol outfit she wore when she sang with Cham. The doppelganger becomes even more ominous when it escapes the two-dimensional confines of the mirrors and screens and takes on a life of its own, literally bouncing in and out of Mima's view. Mima becomes terrified that she is losing her mind, especially when she dreams vividly of murders that turn out to be real. The doppelganger may wear the pink, frilly dress and hair ribbon of Mima's former pop singer incarnation, but its presence is threatening, even evil, opening up the audience to the possibility that Mima herself may be the murderer.

Kon sees *PERFECT BLUE* as dramatizing the confrontation between these two Mimas. "In the beginning there was only a slight difference between the real Mima and Mima in the mirror," Kon said. "Then there started to be more differences between them. The movie symbolizes the process of Mima's mental struggle." Mima's conflicts are worked out through several violent (and controversial) scenes, one of

which takes place on a movie set where Mima is the "victim" of a simulated rape while a crowd of extras cheers on the "rapist." The simulated rape was not meant to be related to Mima's mental stability, according to Kon. "The main theme of this scene is the death of the celebrity, the death of the pop star. It's a destruction of an idol. For the fans, and also for Mima, it symbolizes the death of the idol."

The rape scene ends with a fleeting shot of Mima in her pop star glory, a reminder both that Mima's former persona of innocence and joy goes hand in hand with her attempts to portray a more sordid, grittier type of woman, and that no matter how high she may have climbed, someone is waiting to tear her down. *PERFECT BLUE* explores this ambivalent relationship between fan and performer. "Mima, as a pop star with the group Cham, would be considered a 'B-level celebrity' in Japan," Kon said. "The group's goal is, of course, to have a big hit, but their fan base is limited and tends to be less fanatical." Kon points to a scene where Cham entertains an enthusias-

tic crowd on a department store rooftop. The audience serves as an example of the type of fans attracted to groups like Cham. "At these events, the distance between the celebrity and the fan is close. The same fans get together all the time. They are called '*Otaku*,'" Kon said. "I personally don't have the experience of being an '*Otaku*' for a celebrity, so I don't know that much about it, but from what I've heard, they love these celebrities *because*



the celebrities are not the most popular — these fans might even leave the celebrity once he or she gets too popular. They like being able to feel close to the celebrity; they like that the celebrities seem close to them. 'B-level' celebrities often are not the best singers, or the best looking, and that might be why fans feel close to them. It might sound strange, but that's the attraction. In Japanese culture, there is a idolization of immaturity and girlishness which is quite different from a 'Lolita complex.' The celebrity who gains attention is immature as a singer, as a model, and as a woman. Fans love that immaturity. If you have someone more immature than you, you won't have to show your own immaturity. This is comfortable for the fans and they prefer not to destroy this nice and comfortable relationship between them-

selves and a celebrity. If the celebrity matures for some reason, it destroys this relationship."

While the rape scene depicts the symbolic destruction of a celebrity, another, even more controversial scene — the murder of a photographer who has taken nude shots of Mima — was designed to express Mima's inner turmoil. The scene is extraordinarily gruesome and graphic, and it takes a



shocking turn when the action suddenly becomes part of the sleeping Mima's nightmare — even in her dreams she harbors resentment against the photographer who laid her bare for the pages of a magazine. When she wakes, her hands are free of blood, yet it's not a dream: the photographer really has been murdered. "The ice pick murder scene is deeply related to Mima's mental condition," Kon explained. "This scene starts from the objective description of a photographer, Murano, who is watching a TV drama, *DOUBLE BIND*, but it is also Mima's subjective dream. Her feelings of hatred and the unconscious desire to kill him appear as a dream. It's a kind of trick for the audience. Mima subconsciously hates the photographer, even though he brought her one step closer to fame. Mima is thankful to the photographer, but her feelings toward him are inconsistent."

Mima's initial girlishness, her inner conflicts, and her growth are expressed both through facial design and costume design. When Kon

signed on as director, character designer Hisashi Eguchi had already designed Mima and the members of Cham. "Eguchi is famous for drawing cute girl characters — his girl character designs are popular in Japan," Kon said. "When he draws ordinary people, they become more cartoony, so we needed to have a balance to unify the movie's overall look. We wanted to make this movie more reality-



WHEN THE MIRROR DISTORTS: Director Kon uses different drawing styles to contrast Mima's image as the girlish leader of Cham and her plainer, civilian presence.

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— OTAKU FROM HELL —

"They like that the celebrities seem close to them," said director Satoshi Kon. "The celebrity who gains attention is immature as a singer, a model, and a woman. If you have someone more immature than you, you won't have to show your own immaturity."

design was Hideki Hamasu's. He suggested the image of sheep's eyes. In Japanese, the expression 'to have sheep eyes' means someone's eyes are expressionless."

Kon is gratified by PERFECT BLUE's reception, especially the enthusiastic approval from overseas. "I made PERFECT BLUE in a small corner of a small island in Japan, and I realized that the film we worked on is now out there in the big world. It's a wonderful feeling and it has altered my attitude about my future work."



LOVED TO DEATH: The "Mimaniac" is a fan so obsessed with his idealized image of the pop idol that he even manages to insinuate himself into the standard, cast roundup for PERFECT BLUE (left). But is he obsessed enough to kill? **LOWER LEFT:** Mima at odds. Long sheltered from life's cruelties, can the singer survive in a more brutal reality?



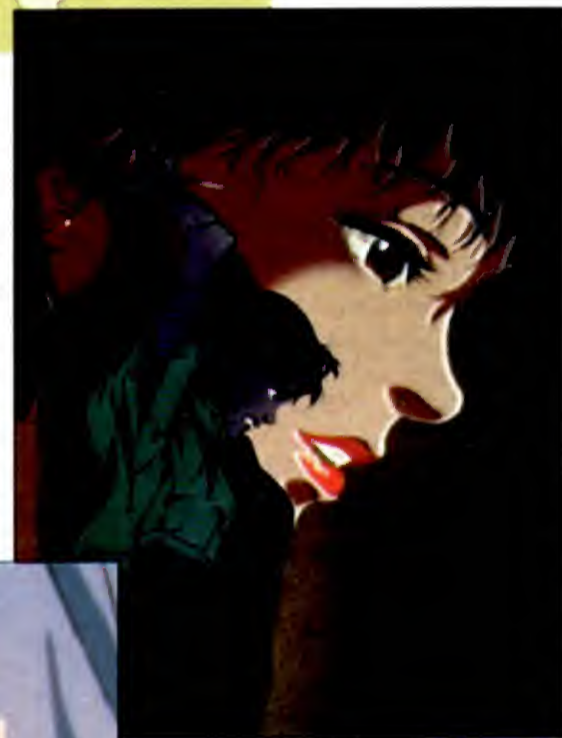
based, so the character design needed to be more realistic. But we also considered the marketing side, so we used Eguchi's design for the faces of the main character and her band Cham. We tried to draw Mima's 'pop star' face and her 'daily face' differently. Her 'pop star' face is closer to Eguchi's cute, dolly-face style. We called this face 'Virtual Mima.' On the other hand, her 'daily face' is the face she took on as her 'mask.' We had less expression on her face, but not too much for the audience to notice."

For the other characters' design, Kon worked with animation supervisor Hideki Hamasu. "Compared to the main character, the other characters have less expression," he said. "We tried to give these characters faces that you can find anywhere in daily life, except for Uchida, the stalker. He needed to be a character whose thoughts are opaque, so we made him as expressionless as possible, especially in his eyes. The eye

People always say, 'overseas expansion,' and, 'worldwide acceptance.' I still question this. It is of course good from a business standpoint, but that can make the work distorted. The work which is easier for foreigners to understand isn't necessarily as good as the kind of work that will gain worldwide acceptance. I think it's important to make the work honestly. By attending

the international film festivals, I realized that I am Japanese and that I felt strongly about being Japanese. I would like to reflect

these experiences in my future work." Currently, Kon's next project is a film called SEN-NEN-JOYU, for which he wrote the original story. The script is by PERFECT BLUE writer Sadayuki Murai, the film itself will be directed by Matsuo Kou.



PERFECT BLUE's audience may leave screenings pondering the meaning of the title, but Satoshi Kon does not have an explanation. "I didn't supervise the English-language version, but the words 'perfect blue' probably are not in the film," he said. "I have difficulty when I am asked about the meaning of the title. The novel's title was *Perfect Blue*. In the original story it might have had a meaning, but I changed the story and maybe also the theme, too. While we were in production, we talked about changing the title because it doesn't match the story. I think it's a strange title, but I like it. It sounds meaningful and also conveys a mysterious mood." **APQ**





the IRON giant

Abandoning his studio's attempt to replicate Disney's success, director Brad Bird comes up with an animated feature that's quirky, funny, and classically Warners.

Animation veteran Brad Bird, director of this summer's **THE IRON GIANT**, equates good filmmaking with good stripping. Now that your attention has been fully captured, let him explain: "Audiences absolutely love to be seduced. So many of our MTV filmmakers are like strippers who immediately whip their boobs out without doing a lap dance."

During production on **IRON GIANT**, Bird fought hard against this rat-a-tat, short-attention-span school of storytelling that seems to have pervaded many mainstream films, especially in animation. "I think that there is a fear within Hollywood, and animation as well," he noted, "that the audience has a remote control and they're going to change channels if you aren't shrieking at them every second."

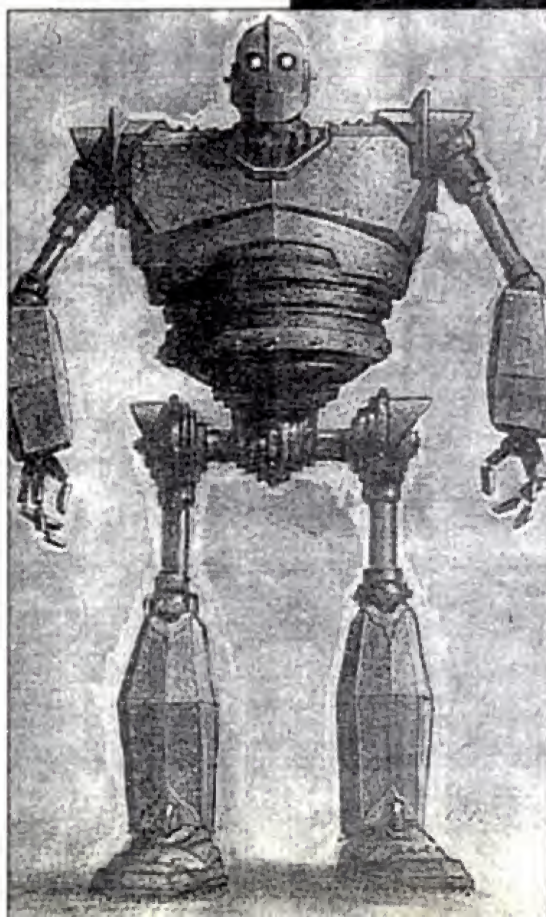
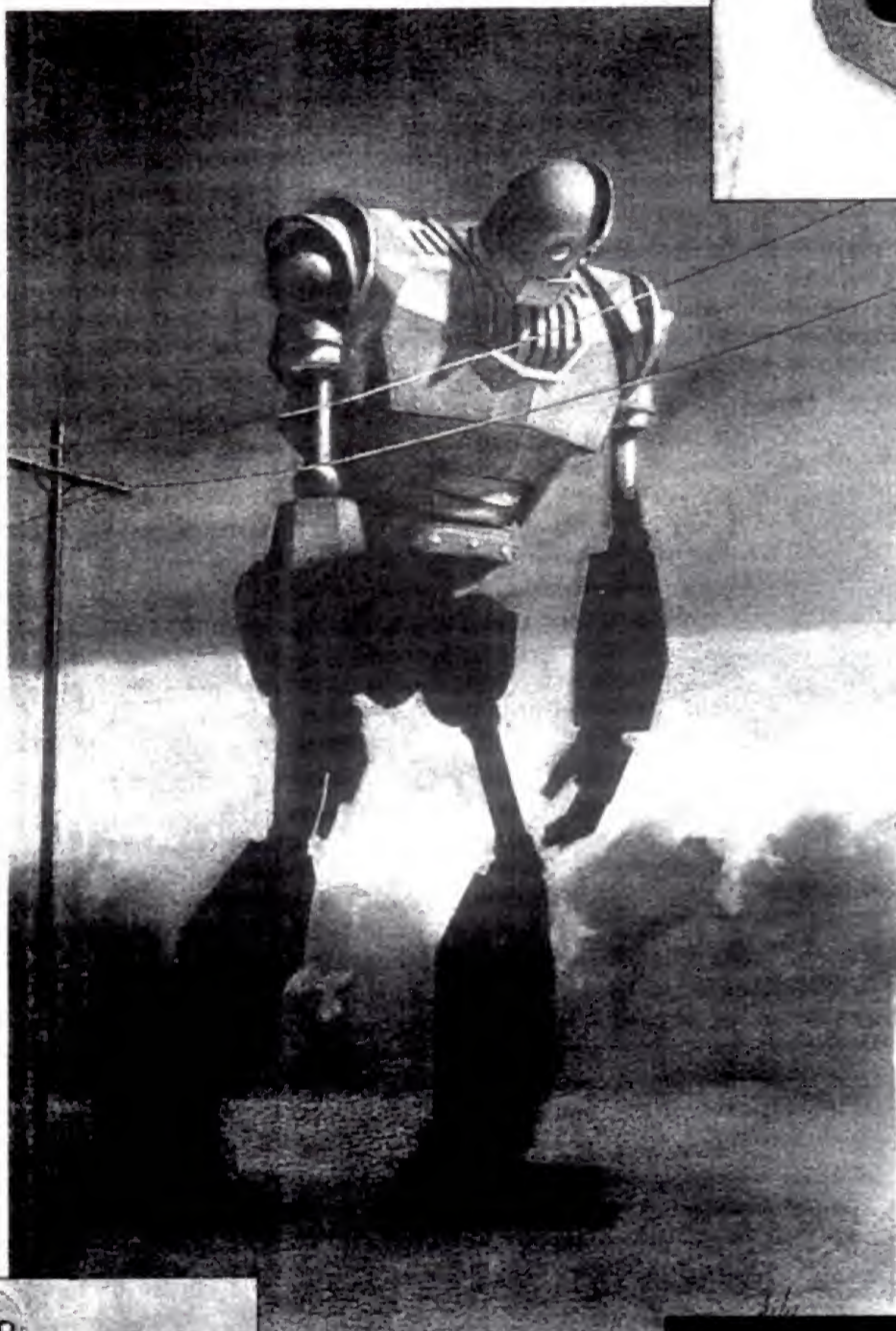
THE IRON GIANT bucks this current trend, introducing smaller moments, along with big, action setpieces. In addition, the film very straightforwardly tells the tale of a young boy who befriends a 50-foot metal robot that has fallen to earth from outer space. Jettisoned were such familiar animated staples as the comedy sidekick and the Broadway show tune.

"I would probably put it somewhere between playing around with the formula and throwing it out," said Bird. "I think, in many ways, playing around with it is throwing it out."

We are not re-inventing storytelling. There are a lot of antecedents to this film — **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**, **KING KONG**, **FRANKENSTEIN**, **E.T.**, even **TERMINATOR 2**.

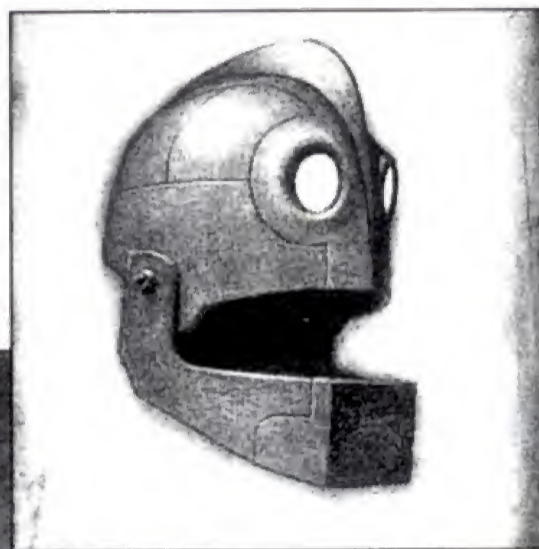
In the film, set in Maine during the '50s, a young boy named Hogarth overhears a lo-

cal fisherman spinning a tale of an iron giant, whom he spotted at sea during a storm. No one in the town believes the fish tale, with the exception of Hogarth, who later comes across the Giant while out exploring one night.



Hogarth befriends the giant and, with the help of a beatnik junkyard owner named Dean, puts the metal man into hiding. Soon, paranoia in the town begins to grow, helped along by Kent, an opportunistic government agent who arrives in the small town to track down the metal anomaly. The Iron Giant's very existence is soon threatened.

The film features the voices of young actor Eli Marienthal as Hog-



arth, Jennifer Aniston as Hogarth's mom, Annie, Harry Connick, Jr. as Dean, Christopher McDonald (**FLUBBER**) as Kent and Vin Diesel (**SAVING PRIVATE RYAN**) as the Giant.

THE IRON GIANT is actually based on *The Iron*

Man, a short story written in 1968 by the late poet laureate, Ted Hughes. It was translated into an album in 1989 by The Who's Pete Townsend, who tried to pitch the idea for an animated feature to Warner Bros.

During an open house at the studio, Bird first saw the possibilities for the tale after spotting some early conceptual art. "It struck me and stayed with me," remembered Bird. "It was this image of a big iron man and a little boy. I saw a lot of projects that same day, everything that was in development was on display. There were probably 40 or 50 projects in development. But [**IRON GIANT**] really cut through all of it and I found myself thinking about it later."

Bird was also drawn to the way in which both the characters of Hogarth and the Giant filled voids in each other's lives. As Hogarth lives with what the director calls the "ever-present missing parent," the Giant serves as a surrogate father. For the Giant, the young boy actually is a protector. "The relationship between the two is that Hogarth is the parent and the Giant is the child," summarized Bird.

Re-setting Hughes' story in the '50s not only allowed **IRON GIANT** to capitalize on the Cold War paranoia and B-movie, sci-fi craze of the time, it also allowed for more dimension in the film's villain, Kent. "He kind of represents two sides of the '50s," noted Bird. "One is

METAL ALLIES: Director Brad Bird designed his mechanical "monster" to capture the clunky charm of a fifties toy while retaining the soulfulness of a human being.

by **MIKE LYONS**

WAITING FOR CAMELOT: The IRON GIANT team adapted the idealized look of the fifties (far right) to create a cast of characters very much of their time.

the wholesome, handsome, all-American, father type. At the same time, he embodies the dark paranoia of the time."

On a more technical level, IRON GIANT also came with a new set of challenges.

Deciding to bring the Giant to animated life through computer generated imagery while all of the other characters would be animated traditionally, meant trying to integrate the two seamlessly, as no film had ever tried before. In other words, the Gi-



ant couldn't look like he just walked over from another film. Said Bird, "Computer stuff tends to be perfect. The wonderful part of that is the exactness of it. The not-so-great part of it is that it tends to be a little sterile. So we created software to un-sterilize it and 'imperfect' it a little bit."

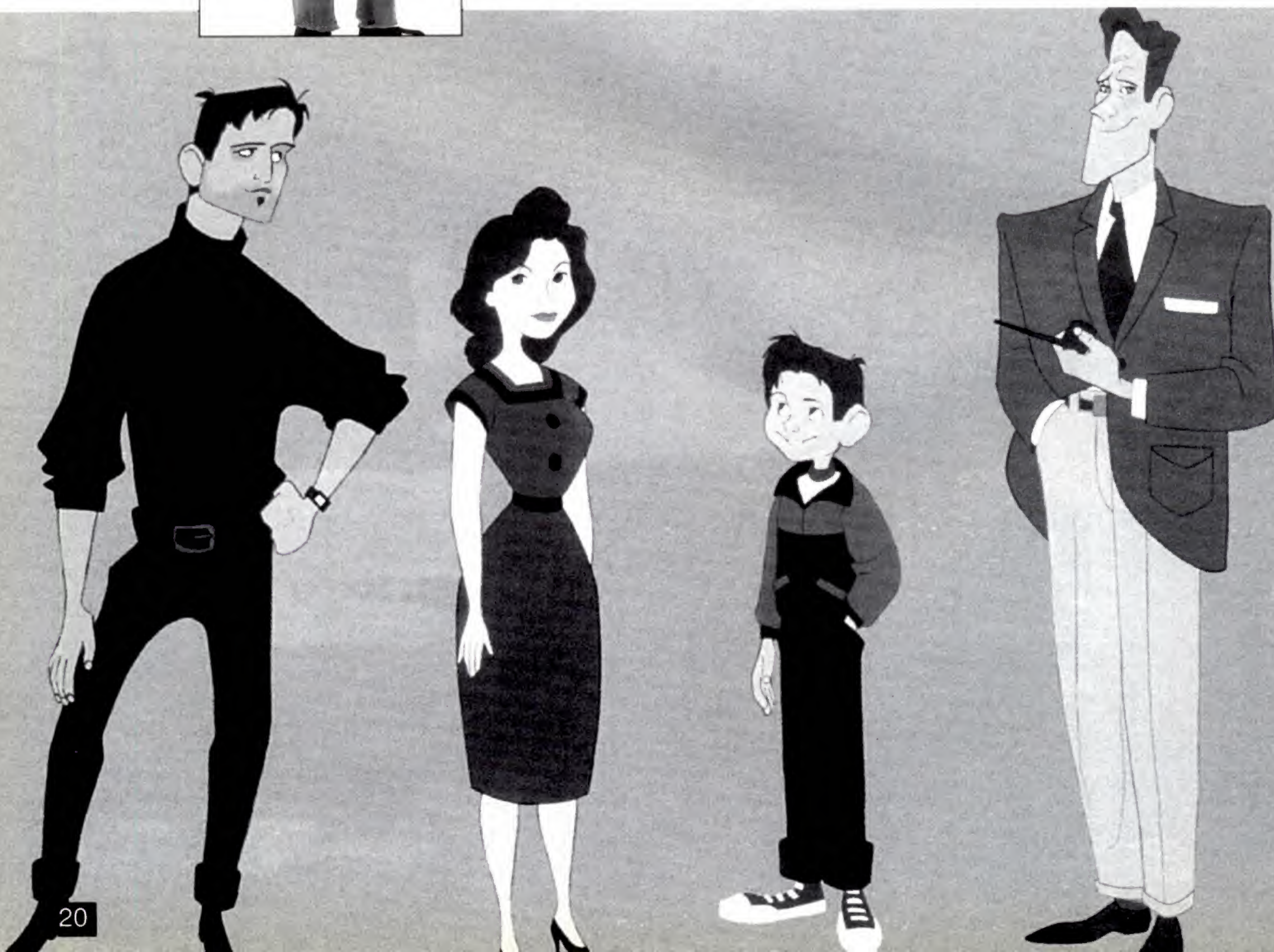
Long before such technology advanced the art of animation, Bird had harbored strong feelings for the medium. In fact, at the ripe young age of 13 he made his own animated film, which caught the attention of the Disney studio. With no training program yet in place for young animators, Bird was brought to Disney, where he mentored under Milt Kahl, one of the studio's top artists and part of Disney's fabled "Nine Old Men" (a name Walt had given to his

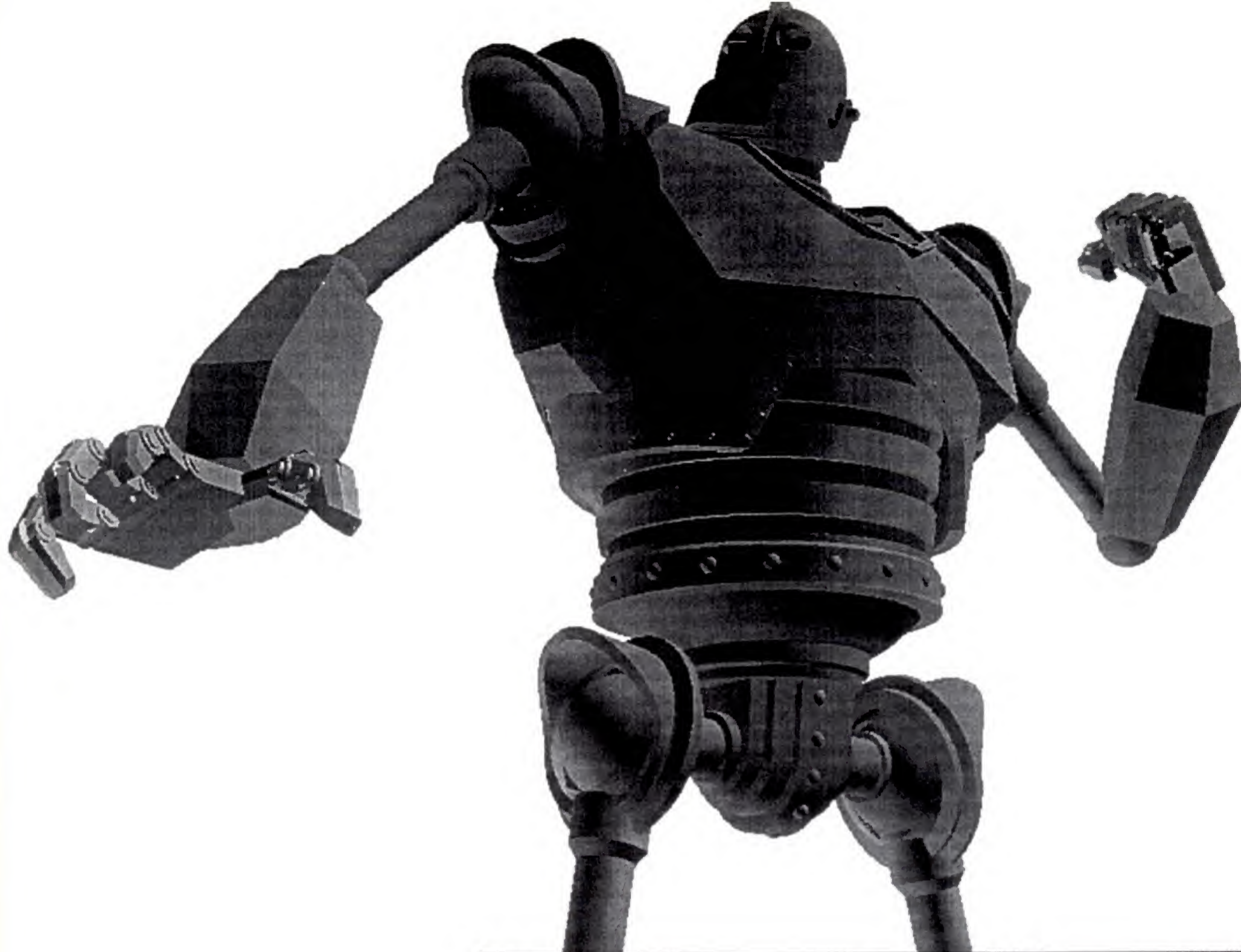


upper echelon of artists). The late artist was also one of the medium's greatest draftsman, who instilled in Bird lessons that he still carries to this day.

"For me, it was like an actor getting to work with Olivier or Spencer Tracy," said Bird, adding, "He taught me to never quit. He told me that it's important to have high standards and to let yourself go until you hit them. I remember one day I was fawning over his draftsman-ship. He could turn anything in space and his scenes were impeccably drawn. He told me, 'I'm not a great draftsman, I just don't quit easily.'"

After beginning his career at the Disney studio, another of Bird's big breaks came when he directed "Family Dog," a popular, animated episode of Steven Spielberg's an-



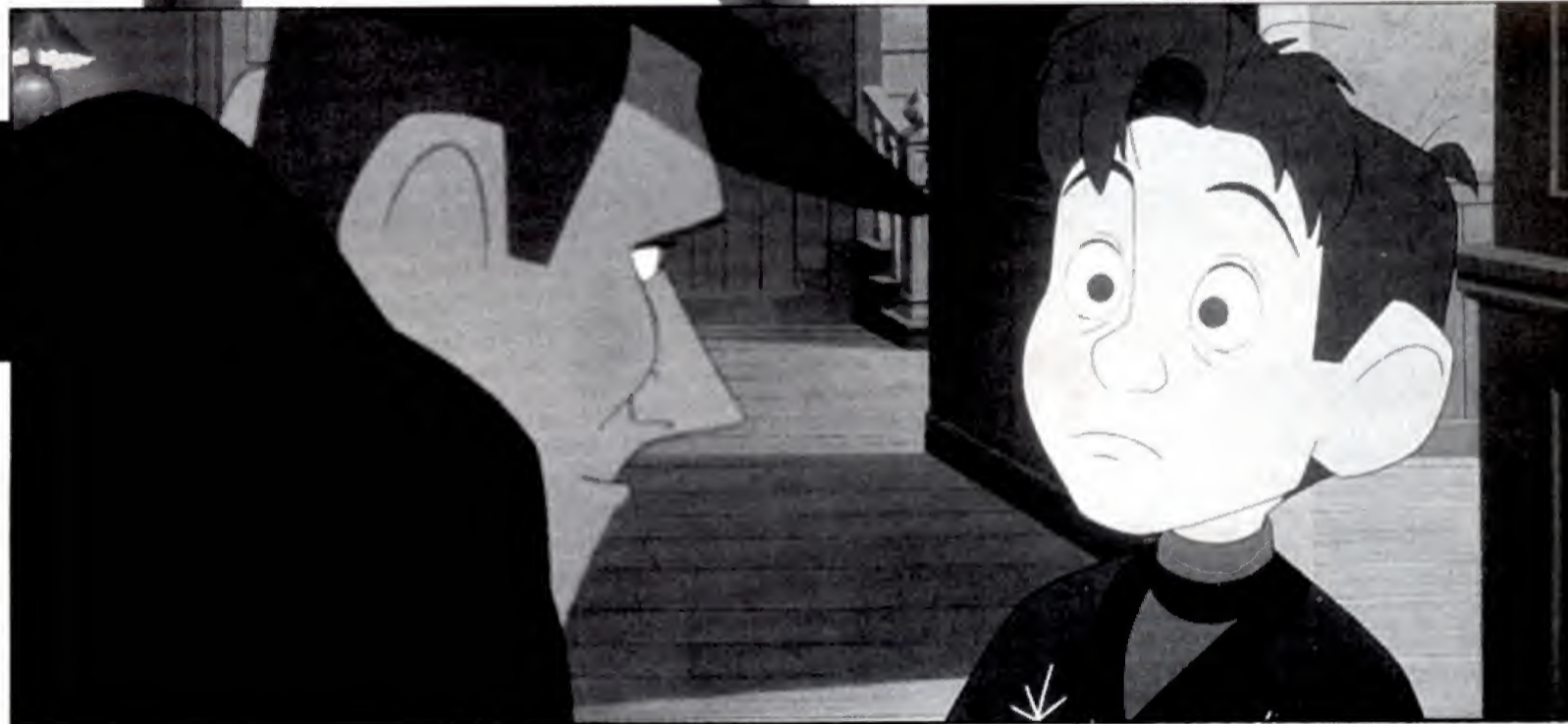


COOL COLD WARRIOR: In defiance of the hyperactive filmmaking style seen in too much theatrical animation, *IRON GIANT*'s main drama comes from the war of wills between young Hogarth and government agent Kent (right).

thology TV series, *AMAZING STORIES*. Even though produced in 1987, a time when animation was stagnant, Bird remembered how much artistic freedom Spielberg afforded him. "We were the only episode, out of the 44 *AMAZING STORIES*, that was what they call a 'negative pickup.' This means that they gave us the money and the schedule and said, 'We'll see you when you're done.'"

In 1989, Bird was hired for a new show being created from animated short subjects that had aired on *THE TRACEY ULMAN SHOW*. *THE SIMPSONS* debuted on January 14, 1990, fueling a major resurgence in televised animation and introducing such pithy phrases as, "Eat my shorts," and, "D'oh!" to the pop culture lexicon.

Bird has his own opinions as to why Homer, Marge and the kids have become ingrained in our collective, TV consciousness. "What probably separates it is the fact that it challenges recognized authority, wherever it is. Whether it's religious authority, governmental authority, teachers,



parents, it challenges that authority. But, underneath it all, this family, as dysfunctional as they are, love each other. I think that came through."

After leaving *THE SIMPSONS* several years ago, Bird pursued other projects before landing at *IRON GIANT*, most notably his science-fiction film, *RAY-GUNN*, which was to be produced for the now defunct Turner Feature Animation Studio. He currently has another project in development at Warner Bros.

It's films like the formula-altering *IRON GIANT*, and the open possibilities for the near future, that have Bird breathing a sigh of relief that animation has finally

gotten its due. "I've wanted it to be in this state much sooner than it was. I've been rattling cages for a long time about the fact that there's another audience for animation, and I'm gratified that it's finally happened. When I first started, I was naive about the amount of vision that there is in this business. I'm much more pragmatic now about the price you pay for doing something different.

"I don't know how many times I've heard, 'You haven't got a prayer.' To anyone who's out there reading this and has something different that they're going to do — just grit your teeth and get what you want onto the screen."

AFQ

BATMAN BEYOND

He de-powered the
Power Rangers and
forced ABC to endure
one rough Saturday Morning

The story of how a Dark Knight
was reborn as the bright
light of the Kids' WB



FEAR THE DARKNESS: As did a certain, tortured millionaire decades before him, Terry McGinnis assumes the guise of the cowled crusader to fulfill an overweening desire for justice (and to purge some as-yet unrevealed ghosts of the past).



ABOVE: Time Warp: High-tech supervillains such as the sinuous shape-shifter Inque prove that this ain't your daddy's Batman. **FAR RIGHT AND RIGHT BELOW:** Toxic Skyscape: As with its prior incarnations, BATMAN BEYOND's backgrounds employ distinctive coloring and a bold design sense to evoke a Gotham at once awe-inspiring and fear-inducing.

by DENNIS FISCHER

A thin, tall figure in a black and red suit gazes down on a 21st century Gotham City. His incredible bat-suit enhances his strength and is flight-capable; in his ear is the voice of Bruce Wayne, the voice of experience, an ever-present counsel guiding the young protege past the dangers that confront any superhero-to-be. The youth's mission? In the world of Gotham: to battle the dark and terrible forces that threaten the city. In the reality of the fledgling Kids' WB Network: to win the Saturday morning ratings battle. One could well say that both missions have been accomplished: premiering in January 1999, the Batman of BATMAN BEYOND has since faced down every super-villain from old stalwart Mr. Freeze to the newfangled shape-shifter Inque. More importantly, the guy has been renewed for an additional 39 episodes, starting this September.

ORIGINS

The guiding lights for BATMAN BEYOND are its writer-designer-producers Alan Burnett, Paul Dini, and Bruce Timm, and designer-turned-producer Glen Murakami, the same team that shepherded the original BATMAN animated series to four Emmy wins (and created the equally acclaimed SUPERMAN animated series). According to producer Alan Burnett, BAT-

MAN BEYOND was created because there was "a feeling that Batman needed a new shock of some sort going for it. We had done 109 traditional BATMAN episodes, and it had been on the air since 1992. This is a pretty long haul for a guy in tights. There was a feeling around Warner Bros. that maybe the time had come to do something radical with the character. The kingdoms that be at Warner Bros. thought that maybe we should go for a younger Batman somehow, someday."

According to producer Bruce Timm, in November of 1997, there was a meeting with Paul Dini, Alan Burnett, executive in charge of production Jean MacCurdy, the head of the WB Network Jamie Kellner, and himself. Recalled Timm, "Jamie was concerned that the old, classic BATMAN show, even though it was doing really great ratings, was skewing a little bit old in the demographics. We've always been proud of the fact that adults and teenagers watch the show, but they were concerned that there were more teenagers or late teenagers to young adults watching the show than kids, and a lot of their advertising revenue comes from young kids."

"We were just toying with the idea of how we can make Batman more accessible to young kids. During the course of this meeting, it became very apparent that Jamie wanted to do more than just revamp the current series; he literally wanted to reinvent it from the ground up. It was more than just tinkering with the design or adding more

teenagers to the show. At one point he said, 'What if we put a teenager in the batsuit?' We all kind of just went, 'Oh, okay...'

"From there we came up with the concept that eventually became BATMAN BEYOND. Some of the ideas that we first talked about was doing a young Bruce Wayne show, the adventures of Bruce Wayne before he became Batman. I said, 'Well, that's okay, except that there's no Batman in it.' Then there was another concept that was like the Phantom from the comics, where Bruce Wayne was just the latest recipient of the bat costume. We didn't want to do anything like that; we didn't want to do anything that a) violated the spirit of the comics, and b) wiped out the continuity that we had established."

"To keep all of that in mind, we came up with this concept of setting the show in the future. Bruce Wayne is too old to be Batman, he has to get somebody else to be Batman, so that's where the teenager comes in. In a nutshell, that's how the concept came about."

Producer Paul Dini asserted that BATMAN BEYOND, "takes its creative spark from our original

BATMAN series. We look on it more as a continuation of the BATMAN cartoon series rather than something that was originally inherent in the comic books. We're doing a sort of 'what if' future based on the established animated series, and so we looked ahead about 40 or 50 years into the next century. We said, 'If Bruce Wayne was an old man and he was physically unable to fight crime, what would he do? Would he hang it up or hand it over to somebody else?'

"What he's done in our series is that he's grudgingly handed over the reins to a kid who has come to him with a chip on his shoulder. They forge a sort of sometimes-supportive, sometimes-adversarial relationship where they are fighting together for the common good, only Bruce is now behind the scenes, with his new associate Terry McGinnis actually out in the field in the Batman costume. The sidekick is now the hero, and vice versa."

"There's a big generation gap between them; they have wildly different approaches to solving problems, so there is some conflict there. Terry is much more of a brawler. He's learning the art of self-control and stealth and deduction, whereas Bruce's relationship with him is reopening his eyes to what it's like to be young again and to be doing all this stuff for the first time."

"It's that relationship of the mentor: the old samurai warrior who has a young charge who wants to be given direction," expanded Burnett. "The idea that student

and master don't get along was also intriguing for us. I was also interested in working with a flawed boy, and Terry McGinnis is sort of a troubled hothead.

"We are also actually, at this very moment, starting to add to his background. We will learn that a few years before the series started, he was actually in juvenile hall, that things had gotten that bad for him. So he's a troubled kid who is now making good and is determined to really prove himself beyond just avenging his father's death."

NEW BLOOD, OLD TORMENTS

The new Batman in **BATMAN BEYOND** is Terry McGinnis, a rebellious, 17 year-old high school senior with a troubled background and idealistic views of how the world should be. In the premiere episode, corporate henchmen murder his father and Terry stumbles onto the opportunity to become Batman and avenge his father's demise. Terry moves in with his mother, who had previously divorced his father and who once considered her son too much to handle. Now, Terry must learn to adjust to her expectations and to his responsibilities.

"He was always envisioned to be sort of a hothead," commented Dini. "He was somebody who fought with his fists initially, and then only later sat back and reasoned things out. We liked the idea of a character who had sort of a chip on his shoulder, who would be very action-driven, and yet very smart and canny in a way. We thought that was a good place to start with the new Batman. We didn't want to repeat Bruce Wayne and bring in a rich kid who had lacked for nothing in his life and yet became a vigilante.

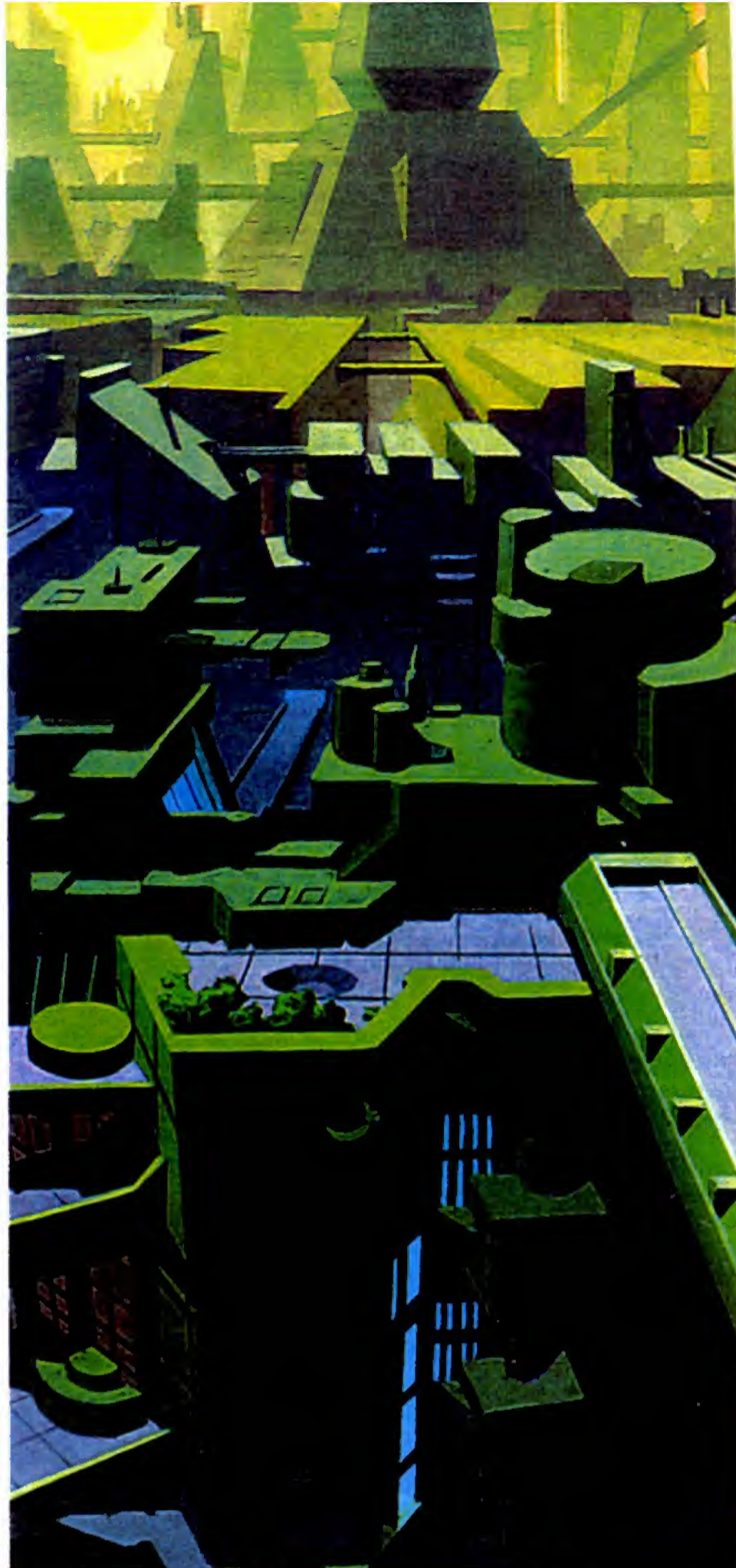
"Initially, when we did the development on Terry and told his story with him avenging his father's death, we asked, 'What's going to come up?' Theoretically, he's avenged his father's death and brought to justice the people who did it; why should he

go on being Batman? We looked at his character again recently, and we decided to come up with ways to tweak it and give him more of an ongoing mission and responsibility, which is going to come out a bit more in the next season.

"One of the ideas that we always wanted to play around with, and we're actually bringing to the fore, is the idea that Terry is sort of a bad kid. He's been a bad kid before, and the idea that, somewhere in his past, he's done a few really bad things and he's had to atone for them. He was in juvenile hall at one point in the last few years before he became Batman, and he's been trying to atone for that.

"In addition to his regular, teenaged problems, he's got this past reputation as a bad kid that he's trying to live down. One of the reasons that he wants to stay being Batman is that he feels he's got a few blots on his soul that he really would like to expunge. As time goes on, we're going to find out what those things are, and how they have repercussions for him now that he's older and supposedly knows better."

According to Dini, a Batman who has been a lawbreaker himself will likely have more compassion for the criminals he apprehends: "We want to make him into



somebody who has seen both sides of the law, so there will be compassion there. But there will also be a sense of responsibility to society as a whole. He's evolving into a very complex character, but also a very likable one. The more we give him the shading, the more we like him, the more heroic he seems to us.

"One thing we didn't want to do was settle into this pattern of, 'Old man Wayne needs me again, I guess I'd better go off and become Batman.' We really want to keep working on the relationship between him and Bruce, and between Terry and himself.

"With the first season, we were really trying to find our footing with the show and the characters. We had a lot of different elements we had to service, whether it was the superhero element — bringing in this new Batman, giving you a lot of Batman action — or the teen element, the family element, or the element of Bruce Wayne. And you can't let Wayne be relegated to the shadows. In our minds, he is and will always be Batman to a degree, but we have to work and find new roles for him. So there was a lot of stuff to get up and running within the space of 13 episodes."

THE BREATH OF LIFE

Will Friedle, who stars as Eric Matthews on *BOY MEETS WORLD*, voices Terry McGinnis/Batman. According to the series' voice director Andrea Romano, the actor's selection came after extensive auditions for the role: "One of our producers had seen Will's work on *BOY MEETS WORLD* and said, just as a last shot effort, 'You know, this young actor is very talented. Let's bring him in, read him, see how he does.' We auditioned him and we just loved his audition. It's also one of those casting situations where you listen to the voice as he progresses on through the series and you wonder how you could have even considered anybody else. He's so good at it, and he's such a fine young actor.

"He's got a lot of energy. A role like a Batman character who goes through a lot of fight scenes requires a really specific kind of voice acting, which you have to teach him how to do. 'Whoa! Ugh! Aww, yeah, egh.' All those sounds which we call impact sounds. Will is a very fast learner on those

things, and he's learning very quickly how to do them.

"He does a very subtle voice change for Terry McGinnis versus Batman. Terry McGinnis has a very genuine, honest, straight-ahead sound. When he performs the voice of Batman, his voice is pitched down slightly. He adds a little bit of air to it and pushes it out a little bit harder, so that it

him to once more take an active role in crimefighting. While the new Batman performs the physical feats that Wayne's decrepit body is no longer capable of, Bruce remains at the Batcomputer, feeding Terry valuable information over a radio link to the new, high-tech batsuit. No one knows Gotham City or the dark side of humanity better than he, and he will guide the impulsive youth past the potential pitfalls — if McGinnis will only listen.

"It's funny," noted Timm. "On the old series, one of our old writers, Michael Reaves, told me that he thought the dynamic of Batman and Robin was Dirty Harry teaming up with Spider-Man. I thought that was a great idea, though I don't think we actually accomplished that. I felt that Robin was just too bland a character to do that.

"But when we came up with this new show, I kinda remembered what Michael had said, and that subconsciously pushed us in that direction: to make [McGinnis] a little bit more of a spitfire, rebel kind of character, but also more fun. He's a smart-ass, and he's not always right, and he's very street on a certain level. Then we add in this ultra-cranky authority figure, and it really makes a nice contrast.

"We've always tried to [explore the psychological aspects of the characters], even going back to the old 'classic' BATMAN episodes. Every time we used one of the classic villains, we always tried to figure out why that character was the way they were. There was a catch [for BATMAN BEYOND,] though. That worked like gangbusters on the old BATMAN show — in our version of the BATMAN ethos, he is just a justice figure, he's not really a three-dimensional human being. We actually tried to keep him away from being a three-dimensional human being. We wanted to make him cold, emotionless, and really driven.

"To do that, we had to take out a lot of extraneous dialogue. We didn't want him to be really chummy with people. A lot of times he's by himself in shadows. Even when we did the new episodes for the WB when we teamed him up with Batgirl and



THE BIG LAFFS JUST KEEP

COMING: Despite a desire to avoid rehashes of well-known villains from the previous series, the producers of *BATMAN BEYOND* have found that there are some "bad" ideas that cannot be denied. Above: the Jokerz indulge their inner Shecky.

is a more forceful voice. When Batman speaks, he is more often commanding, as opposed to Terry McGinnis who is in high school and would just be speaking."

The genuinely commanding presence in the series, though, is provided by Bruce Wayne, who in the premiere episode is shown as having quit his role as the Batman

after being forced to shoot a kidnapper with a gun in order to save his own life. In the intervening years, Wayne has become something of a recluse, living out his old-age in a now-empty Wayne Manor, his alter-ego abandoned.

When Terry stumbles upon Wayne's secret Batcave, the millionaire responds to McGinnis' energy and passion. The young man's enthusiasm awakens long dormant emotions in the elderly Wayne, enabling

Continued on page 28

BATMAN BEYOND
First Season Episode Guide
by Dennis Fischer

Executive Producer: Jean MacCurdy. **Producers:** Alan Burnett; Paul Dini; Bruce Timm. **Production manager:** Shaun McLaughlin. **Story editors:** Stan Berkowitz; Alan Burnett; Paul Dini; Rich Fogel. **Writers:** Hilary J. Bader; Stan Berkowitz; Alan Burnett; Paul Dini; Robert Goodman. **Music director/composer:** Shirley Walker. **Casting director:** Leslie Lamers. **Voice director:** Andrea Romano. **VOICE CAST:** Will Friedle (Terry McGinnis/Batman); Kevin Conroy (Bruce Wayne); Stockard Channing (Barbara Gordon); Sherman Howard (Derek Powers); Lauren Tom (Dana Tan); Seth Green (Nelson Nash); Teri Garr (Mary McGinnis); Ryan O'Donahue (Matt McGinnis).

REBIRTH PARTS I and II
Story: Alan Burnett. **Part I** written by Alan Burnett and Paul Dini; **Part II** written by Stan Berkowitz. **Director:** Curt Geda. **Guest voices:** Michael Gross; George Takei; Mari Devon.

Many years after Bruce Wayne has retired as Batman, a troubled teenager named Terry McGinnis accidentally stumbles onto his secret. After McGinnis' father is murdered by ruthless industrialist Derek Powers and his henchman, Mr. Fixx, McGinnis steals a high-tech batsuit and, with Wayne's grudging help, sets out to stop Powers from selling deadly bio-



weapons to a hostile government. With his eyes re-opened to Gotham's desperate state, Wayne agrees to train McGinnis to become the next Batman.

It is an odd touch that the once-heroic Bruce Wayne, famed philanthropist, is partnered with Powers, an out-and-out unscrupulous corporate villain whose work frequently threatens to endanger the city that Wayne had fought for so long to protect. At "Rebirth's"

beginning, Wayne just seems to say "I don't care anymore," letting raiders come in and buy into Wayne Enterprises. The aging millionaire is left with an emeritus or honorary position at the company. He's still a major stockholder, but Powers controls the lion's share of the company.

"We hint in the pilot in the very beginning that Powers is trying to make moves into Wayne Enterprises and at that time, Wayne is holding his own with Powers," commented Burnett. "But then comes that fatal night when he uses a gun to save himself, and he realizes that it's all over. That's the point when he wraps it up."

"When Terry McGinnis comes into his life and starts the rebirth of Batman in Gotham City, there is also a rebirth of the old guy. We have plans for him to regain control of his company down the line."

BLACK OUT

Writer: Robert Goodman. **Director:** Dan Riba.

Gotham's businesses are



falling victim to an epidemic of sabotage. McGinnis discovers it's all the work of one woman: Inque, a deadly shapeshifter who, unbeknownst to the crimefighter and his mentor Bruce Wayne, is in the employ of Derek Powers.

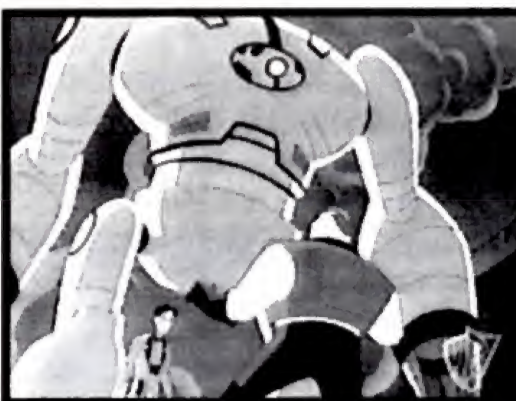
"For the villains," said Timm, "we didn't want to just use Joker 2000 or Two Face 2000 or Clayface 2000. We wanted to come up with all new villains that somehow echoed the old villains and at the same time were new, and made sense in this more science fiction type world. James Tucker did about 30 drawings of all these villain types. I saw one drawing and said, 'Wow! What's that?'"

"He said, 'I don't know, she's just this weird, globby character.' He'd actually named her too. He'd wrote on it, 'Inque.' We said, 'Wow, there's something really cool about that.'"

GOTHAM GOLEM

Writer: Hilary Bader. **Director:** Butch Lukic. **Guest voice:** Scott McAfee; Bill Smitrovich

A skinny, insecure teenager named Willie Watt (Scott McAfee from LAND BEFORE TIME) seeks revenge against his browbeating



father and his abusive classmates when he gains psychic control of a powerful robotic drone known as the Golem. Once again, that old saying about absolute power proves true, and Batman has to intervene, a step complicated by the emotional attachment Willie has developed towards his mechanical behemoth.

"Willie Watt and the Golem is a great story," observed Timm, "but it's an old Batman formula plot because it focuses so much on the villain that Terry walks on, Bruce tells him to get to work, and he goes and fights. It's not really about Terry. After watching those couple of episodes, I had a meeting with the writers and said this is a problem. We really have to establish Terry more as the star of his own series, because he's not Bruce Wayne. We have to spend more on his relationship with Bruce Wayne, his relationship at school, his family."

THE WINNING EDGE

Writer: Rich Fogel. **Director:** Yukio Suzuki. **Guest voices:** Ian Zering; Larry Drake.

After a few high school athletes turn criminally violent, Batman discovers they're using an illegal substance called Venom to enhance their performance. Suspecting that Bruce Wayne's old foe Bane is behind it, Batman must track down the villain before more lives are destroyed. Story is clearly inspired by the issue of steroids in sports, and offers up good drama in a scene where McGinnis' mother falsely accuses her son of drug use.

"The Winning Edge" was the first full directing assignment for Studio Spectrum animation director Yukio Suzuki.

DEAD MAN'S HAND

Writer: Stan Berkowitz. **Director:** Dan Riba. **Guest voice:** George Lazenby.

The burden of having a dual identity wears heavily on McGinnis until he meets a girl named Melanie who seems to understand him. Unfortunately, she also has a hidden secret: she and her family are members of the notorious Royal Flush gang. Nice contrast between McGinnis' rejection of Wayne's insistence that personal happiness be deferred to the demands of crimefighting and Melanie's ambivalence over being brought into the family business.

The Royal Flush gang were originally reoccurring characters in the Justice League, who also appeared in a series of advertisements in the back of various DC comics. "There was this Justice League cover where the Royal Flush gang are marching towards the camera and they are holding the Justice League over their heads, and the one in the foreground is Batman," recalled Timm. "DC used to do that all the time - the dead hero cover all over the place. To this day, I've never read that comic, but that image was stuck in my head. I felt the Royal Flush gang just looked neat, so we wanted to see if we could do something with those characters."

MELTDOWN

Story: Hilary Bader. **Writers:** Hilary Bader and Alan Burnett. **Director:** Curt Geda. **Guest voice:** Michael Ansara.

Testing their latest cloning technology, Derek Powers' scientists create a new body for Mr. Freeze (Michael Ansara). Freeze is delighted to be normal again, but his happiness is short-lived when his new body begins to fail. Enraged, he vows vengeance against Powers for giving him false hope.

"I fought against the idea of bringing him back," said Timm. "Mr. Freeze is a character who has been near and dear to my heart since the first season of the origi-



nal show. He's one of those special villains that I think if we are ever going to bring him back, we had better have a damn good story to tell around him because you don't want to cheapen the character by bringing him back too often. Every time we bring the character back, I want it to be a special event."

HEROES

Writer: Rich Fogel. Director: Butch Lukic. Guest voice: Kevin Dunn.

With much fanfare and hype, a new team of superheroes called the Terrific Trio arrives on the scene and promises to clean up Gotham. Batman feels obsolete until he discovers that these highly hyped, so-called heroes have a hidden agenda which could destroy the entire city.

A blatant homage to Jack Kirby and Marvel's Fantastic Four that makes for a fun episode dealing with the exploitation of superheroes (in more ways than one), albeit one in which McGinnis' Batman spends most of his time simply as an observer rather than a participant. "It's an episode that works well on its own, but Terry isn't integral to the story," admitted Timm.

"At one of our villain sessions where we sat around and talked about what kind of new villains we wanted for the series, we toyed with the idea... of turning some heroes into villains, just round robbing and throwing ideas back



and forth. We came up with the idea of doing an evil version of a group like the Fantastic Four. Our first idea was that they weren't going to be just tragic, they would be blatantly evil. Working publicly for good, but behind-the-scenes stealing and stuff like that. That storyline didn't pan out, and it evolved into the story that made it onto the screen."

SPELLBOUND

Writer: Robert Goodman. Director: Butch Lukic. Guest voice:

Robin, we did even more of that, so that Batgirl and Robin had all the dialogue, and he would be like this quiet and angry authority figure, ordering them around. It actually made him seem even darker, even though he's teamed up with these two kids.

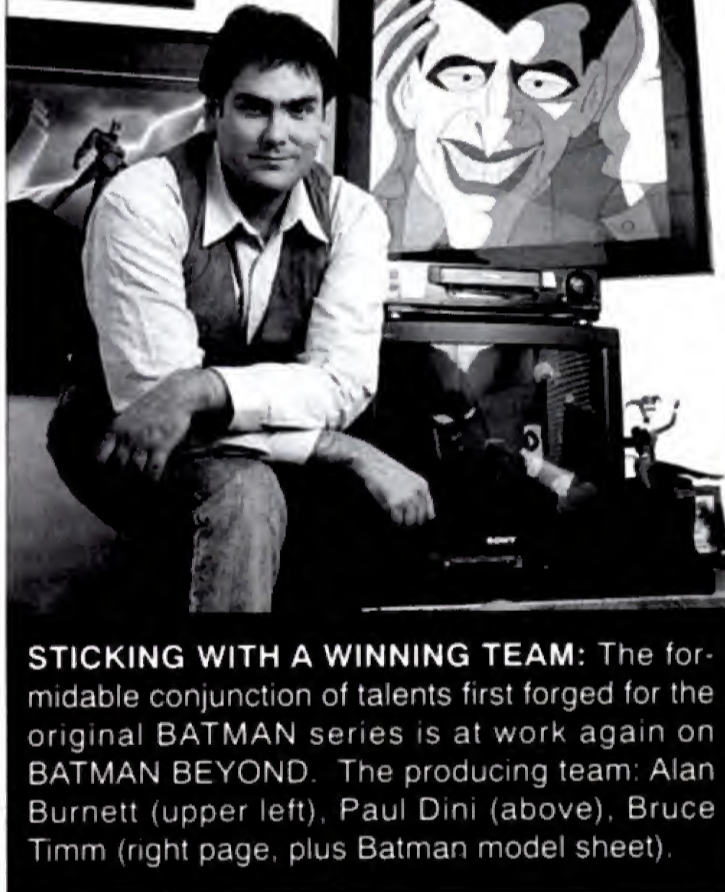
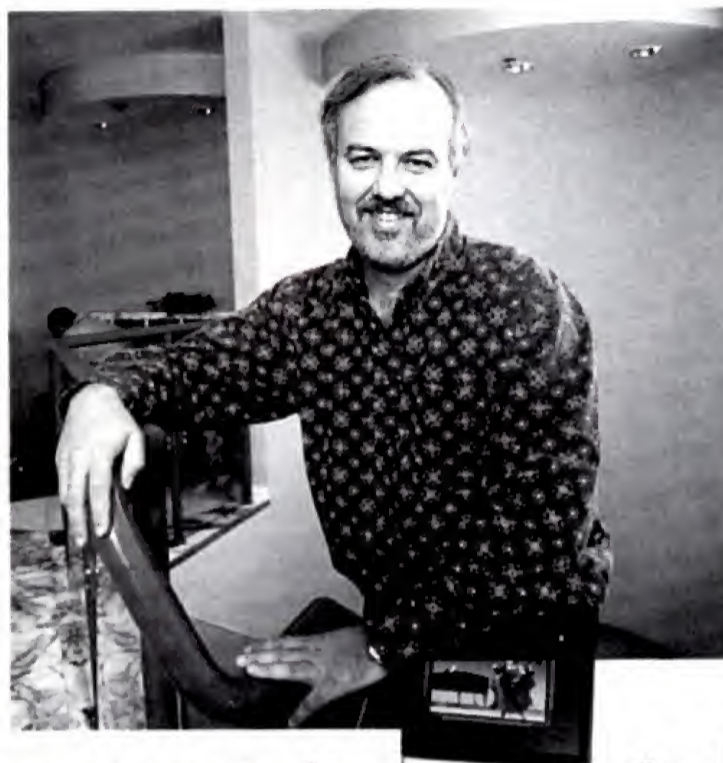
"So focusing on the villains and their psychological motivations was great for the old show because you had a lot of time to dwell on that. Unfortunately, when we started doing BATMAN BEYOND, a lot of the writers were stuck in the old BATMAN formula. They really didn't quite get what the new show was."

In an apt link with the classic BATMAN animated series, Wayne is voiced by Kevin Conroy, who in addition to assuming the mantle of the Dark Knight in the previous series has also had a substantial career on stage and in daytime drama. Said Romano, "It's been very interesting how over the years that voice has progressed and grown and evolved, as many voices do as they continue on through a series year after year. They evolve and become something different."

"Energywise, it is considerably different. It's not just that the character has aged many years since we last saw him, it's that he has become far more embittered, and really is kind of housebound. He rarely, if ever, leaves his house. When you physically watch the actor perform the role, where before he had a strong, upright posture when he was voicing the character — very forceful, and his face would be very bright and alive — now when you watch him, he sits hunched over in a chair. The way that he moves his head and neck is much more the way an older, 70-year-old-type person would move. Therefore, the voice comes out that way."

"It's not nearly as energized a voice. He doesn't push it quite as much to get the voice. Every once in a while he'll have to yell to McGinnis, 'Get out of there now!' and you will see a flame of that old energy that used to be there. For the most part, though, it is a quieter, less energetic, deeper pitched, more breathy, less full sound."

New heroes and new times call for new villains. For the first season of BATMAN BEYOND, the main antagonist was industrialist Derek Powers, who in essence has taken over and corrupted Wayne Enterprises. Commented Dini, "We were looking at the way crime had evolved over the past 40 or 50 years. The old-style, street-level gangsters were no longer a big part of the picture."



STICKING WITH A WINNING TEAM: The formidable conjunction of talents first forged for the original BATMAN series is at work again on BATMAN BEYOND. The producing team: Alan Burnett (upper left), Paul Dini (above), Bruce Timm (right page, plus Batman model sheet).

We were thinking that, over the last few years, we've really seen the rise of the corporation as the new powerhouse in American business. People can take all sorts of shortcuts to get to the top of those companies, there are huge fortunes to be made. We thought, 'What if the criminals had moved off the streets and into the boardrooms?'

"So you have these very unscrupulous, high-tech robber barons, essentially, controlling the stakes in Gotham City — not to say that every corporation is bad, but there are quite a few lapses of ethics in there."

In the premiere episode, Powers gets exposed to a mutagenic nerve gas which covertly transforms him into a walking toxic hazard, later known as Blight. Powers hides this transformation beneath a layer of artificial skin that covers his phosphorescent-green, transparent body, but in moments of stress, the cracks begin to show. Powers will exploit anything and anybody to make a profit, and his hidden agenda is to take revenge on Batman, on whom he places the blame for his condition.

Explained Burnett, "The feeling was that we did want a central villain for

the series, at least for the first season. By the time this gets published, you'll find out that he dies in the thirteenth show."

The part of Derek Powers is voiced by Sherman Howard (LETHAL WEAPON II, CASUALTIES OF WAR, MAX HEADROOM). Recalled Romano, "We had audi-

tioned Sherman Howard for the voice of Lex Luthor. I could be remembering that incorrectly, but I think that we did — he came very close to getting it. We ultimately went with Clancy Brown instead, but I remember saying we have to keep Sherman Howard in mind because he would be an excellent villain. Then when this villain came up, we called the agents and asked around, and went, 'Oh, Sherman Howard, Sherman Howard! Let's bring Sherman Howard back in.'

"And we're all so glad that we did because he's wonderful in that role. Really, really talented. Brings a certain level of oiliness and bad business and someone that can appear to be so good, and yet you know there is something so inherently bad. He just does a wonderful job. We're very

happy to have him on that."

Other regular characters on the show include McGinnis' Asian American girl friend Dana Tan (Lauren Tom), who is bothered by Terry's frequent disappearances and his inability to confide in her; Nelson Nash (BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER and AUSTIN POWER's Seth Green), the star athlete and high school bully who gets away with murder and loves to pick on younger, weaker kids; Terry's mother Mary McGinnis (Teri Garr of YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND), who is pleased that her son is now being responsible and working for the famous Bruce Wayne; Terry's eight-year-old brother Matt McGinnis (Ryan O'Donohue of TALES FROM THE CRYPT: DEMON KNIGHT), who admires the mysterious Batman while seeking any opportunity to squeal on his older brother; and former Batgirl turned police commissioner Barbara Gordon (the highly talented Stockard Channing), who is shrewd, conscientious, matronly yet tough, and who, after a falling out with Wayne, thinks that police work should not be handled by costumed heroes.



FORMING THE FUTURE

Rather than the semi-period feel of the classic BATMAN animated series, BATMAN BEYOND is imbued with a very contemporary feel, reflecting '90s culture in many ways, especially in the fashions worn by the characters and the musical styles used to score the show. Early on, the producers decided they wanted to have a different sound for the music. Said Timm, "Literally, one of those first meetings with Jamie Kellner, he even brought that up: 'What kind of sound do you envision for the show?'"

"And I said, 'I'm thinking possibly rock music.' The only problem with that is we didn't know who would be able to do it. There was literally nothing on the air anywhere on TV that I thought had the kind of sound that we were looking for, something that sounded very modern and authentic and at the same time not just neat rock songs, but that would work the way a musical score works."

"We'd experimented with some rock music on SUPERMAN previously, mixing live guitar and drums with the orchestra, and it never really came out sounding very good. It didn't gel, so I didn't think our usual composers were going to be able to do this new show. I had this uncomfortable meeting with Shirley [Walker, previously the team's musical director on BATMAN and SUPERMAN], where I expressed my doubts. She

said, 'Well, that's fine, I appreciate you'd like to try something new, but at least give us a chance to try it.' I said okay, and figured they deserved that much at least."

Walker had provided BATMAN with its lush orchestral accompaniment, and certainly knew the

BATMAN BEYOND MAIN MODELS

BATMAN

FINAL
JUL 16 1999

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ins and outs of scoring music dramatically for television. To give her an idea of the kind of sound he wanted, Timm provided Walker with music by Nine Inch Nails, White Zombie, and the Propellerheads. Timm recalled saying, "If you guys are going to get this gig, the music has to sound really ballsy, has to sound much nastier than you have ever envisioned before."

"So she got together with her team of composers and put together a demo album of music in the vein of what we were talking about, and played it for me two weeks later, and it was perfect,

It was exactly what we wanted. It was real nasty, heavy metal techno, everything, and yet it had a real, nice, moody, BATMAN feel to it. It was literally perfect. I liked it so much that I had her make CDs of it to distribute amongst my storyboard artists so they could listen to it as a soundtrack while they were working on the series."

Commented Dini, "We wanted to make sure that the future as we envisioned it was not inaccessible to contemporary audiences. If you look at American society of 40 years ago — we're talking the late '50s — a lot of what was around then still applies today. Granted we have VCRs and computers and everything, but we still have automobiles, and we still have elevators and televisions and everything. Life still goes on and it's still recognizable."

"We didn't want to make this 40 years in the future and suddenly it's Buck Rogers time. There are some advances and there are some fantastic sections, but we read a lot of books about speculative fiction and the theoretical future of the next 50 to 100 years, and we found ourselves incorporating some of the more believable elements or possibly believable elements into the series. We didn't want to lose the audience by suddenly setting it in the STAR WARS galaxy or something."

Prior to the series debut, Dini researched speculation about the future, and now tries to keep abreast of the latest scientific advances by reading

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Jon Cypher

An elusive villain called Spellbinder hypnotizes ordinary citizens into committing crimes for him. Batman must uncover Spellbinder's identity before more innocent victims fall under his spell.

"We got an outline from our staff writer Bob Goodman describing this character and his powers," recalled Timm. "In the script he was described as being dressed like an old magician with a top hat and cape and everything, and I thought that didn't work. Glen and I spent the better part of a day just throwing ideas back and forth and sketching out ideas for his look. We settled on a swirly design on his face, and that became his whole motif. It became a Steve Ditko-y kind of thing."

"The weird coda of the story is that the very next day, one of our artists brought in this comic from the '60s that had Spellbinder in it. We didn't realize he was from comics, and he showed us a drawing of him, and it was exactly



what we drew, even the same color scheme. It was so weird. It was like we reinvented the wheel without even knowing it. Strangely enough, we'd done the same thing with Phantasm for the movie."

SHRIEK

Writer: Stan Berkowitz. Director: Curt Geda. Guest voice: Chris Mulkey.

When Bruce Wayne challenges Derek Powers' control of Wayne/Powers Industries, Powers orders an employee named Walter Shreeves to use his latest discoveries in sound wave research to get rid of Wayne. Shreeve becomes Shriek, carrying out his deadly mission. The episode culminates in a *tour de force* sequence in which an electronic sound damper suppresses all audio effects.

Glen Murakami sketched out a design for a villain with a neat-

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DESIGNING



Leading a team of designers and storyboard artists on the BATMAN BEYOND TV series are producers Bruce Timm and Glen Murakami. Timm has been working in animation since about 1981. He's worked for several different studios including Filmation, Don Bluth Productions (where he worked on THE SECRET OF NIMH), and Ralph Bakshi Productions (where he worked on the revived MIGHTY MOUSE series). In fact, he's logged time at most of the studios in town except, strangely, the two best known: Disney and Hanna-Barbera. Murakami's first job in animation was with the first BATMAN series, which he started working on in '91, then with SUPERMAN, and now with the new BATMAN BEYOND.

Timm and Murakami were responsible for designing the look of the new series, including the new batsuit. "It was kind of a challenge," commented Timm, "because the 'real' Batman has just about the coolest costume of any superhero. I knew there were certain

things I had to keep, but I also had to make it futuristic and new.

"I knew immediately that we had to keep the long ears, and he had to have a bat symbol on his chest, but the first thing I did was to put him all in black, just so he would be an all-black silhouette. I did about ten different designs before I came up with the one we finally settled on. I had one that was a lot more

RoboCop-looking, there was a lot more tech stuff over it. Going back to what we learned on the first BATMAN show and the SUPERMAN show, though, we knew detail is not necessarily a good thing in animation. We try to keep the level of detail down so that the show is literally easier to animate and easier to keep on model.

"So I kept going back to simpler designs, and basically

after I came up with the concept of him being all in black and his face being all in black, I wanted to get rid of the cape. Even though the cape is really important to Batman, it's a real pain in the butt from the animation standpoint. It gets in the way of the action. The cape looks great if they animate it really, really well, but if they don't do literally full animation on it, it can look kind-of cardboard and kind-of cheesy. I just eliminated the cape and thought, *OK, it's futuristic—what if he flies? What if he has jets in his boots instead of this cape?* That's where I came up with the idea of the retractable wings.

"I like this because, on the one hand, it still keeps him kind of true to the Batman look, he's got like big batwings now. At the same time, it's a completely different look than he had before. The color scheme kind of suggested itself—classic Dracula colors, black and red. That's how that came about."

While it is a superhero show, BATMAN BEYOND does try to keep a sense of realism in most

FUTURE TECH: The designers of BATMAN BEYOND have had to balance production considerations against visual innovation, whether it's developing a more easily animated batsuit (below), or creating a totemic Gotham City divorced from previous visions of the future (right).



of its elements, though in the case of Batman's flying batsuit, the physics of aerodynamics are largely ignored in favor of wish-fulfillment-style fantasy. Commented producer Paul Dini, "It's taking Batman out of the realm of being purely just a comic book detective into the realm of midgrade superheroes like Iron Man, somebody like that, somebody who is not in and of himself a superhero, but by benefit of what he puts on, can enhance his abilities. We're looking upon it as a futuristic thing. If that technology exists 40 or 50 years into the future — even if Batman was still the young, vital Bruce Wayne — he would probably take advantage of that technology. He always has taken advantage of the cutting edge of technology.

"That's one of the things that as a kid always bugged me. He was called Batman, and yet he couldn't really fly. I thought, he's called Batman, he should fly. We were able to make that happen.

"When [Bruce Timm] showed [the batsuit] to me, I said, 'That is cool. It is sleek, it is built to move, it is very dramatic.' I thought it was great."

When the producers first started talking about BATMAN BEYOND, Timm wasn't sure if he actually wanted to do the series or not. "We'd gotten a lot of good publicity from people saying that our show was really true [to the Batman spirit] and true to the character, more so even than the movies," commented Timm. "People were saying, 'You're the guys who do Batman right.' After that, I didn't want to go down in history as the guy who then came along and screwed everything up.

"I went and talked to Glen. The minute I said it was set in a futuristic Gotham City, he said, 'I'm in, let's do it!' So that was what turned me around. I could have gone either way on it, but as soon as I found out that Glen was excited, then I realized that we could do something with it. So I said, 'Okay, fine, you get to design it.'"

Murakami decided that for the look of the futuristic Gotham City, they should simply expand on what they had already started with the animated SUPERMAN and BATMAN se-

ries, with their art deco look. "Pretty much, we just wanted to make everything bigger and larger," Murakami said. "It's hard to describe the city. The description on the first series was dark deco, so it was important to keep the city dark and scary, but at the same time make it look futuristic."

According to Timm, the designers had an edict from Jean MacCurdy to lighten up on the darkness a bit because there was a concern about the original show being too dark. Recalled Timm, "She said, 'OK, you can set it at night, and it can have mood and mystery, but it can't be depressing and it can't be too dark.' So the first thing we thought of was going back to BLADE RUNNER with all the neon. We decided we were going to splash neon all over the place with giant neon billboards and foreign language lettering all over the cities. It would be evocative but be colorful at the same time."

"Because of animation, there's a problem with the amount of detail," noted Murakami. "Making it look futuristic, making it look larger but without a lot of detail, it is very difficult to give the scale and the size of the city. That's a challenge."

"I'm not sure we ever did completely accomplish that," added Timm. "That was the first thing when the show first premiered. People said, 'Oh, it looks like Japanese animation,' or, 'It looks like BLADE RUNNER.' No matter how hard you try to get away from BLADE RUNNER, everybody has this idea embedded in their psyche about what a futuristic, metropolitan city is going to look like, so we kind of ended up doing that after all."

According to Murakami, the new Gotham City has Aztec touches, and "it still has elements of art deco in it, but it's different than AKIRA or BLADE RUNNER. It's hard to describe it, but everyone wants to compare it to BLADE RUNNER and it's different than that."

The designers tried hard not to do BLADE RUNNER because said Timm, "That's the first thing that everybody does when they do futuristic movie or



TV, they get out all the Syd Mead books, and we purposefully did not do that. Let's not do Syd Mead."

Instead, said Murakami, "We looked backwards at China, South America, and the Aztec pyramids and ziggurats. We always looked at [comic book artist Jack] Kirby from the very beginning. Kirby has always been an influence."

One thing the designers definitely wanted to avoid was any hint of a retro-future. Said Timm, "We tried to avoid any kind of retro-elements at all. That's one of the reasons why we didn't want to do any kind of art deco, because we've done it, and it's also been done a lot. There's been a whole renaissance in deco design, and futuristic deco, even in FIFTH ELEMENT and movies like that. Flying taxicabs, but they look like old Chevys. We really wanted to avoid that as much as possible, simply because it's been done. It was really hard to come up with vehicle designs that didn't look like '57 Chevys with jet engines on them, things like that. It was kind of a challenge."

If the challenges presented were not hard enough, the team was involved simultaneously with finishing up the BATMAN/SUPERMAN ADVENTURES. Explained Timm, "When we first developed this show, we didn't have any development time. After I left that meeting with Jamie back in November, I said, 'OK, so I'll guess we'll develop this, when

should we talk further about this?"

"He said, 'No, we're not talking about this any further. You've got a go as of today.' I'm like, 'Oh my god, you're kidding.' He said, 'No, we want it for next fall.'"

"Literally, we hit the ground running. We were making the show up as we were doing it. I think the show actually came out pretty good."

Among the design influences that Murakami cites are Mr. X and Hugh Ferriss, the latter an early twentieth-century architect who designed industrial complexes and skyscrapers. "Ferriss is moody, very deco, and was a major influence on our first BATMAN show," said Timm. "I think the only thing we went back to Hugh Ferriss for on this series was the scale."

"That was one thing we really wanted to do on the show, we're always making the city bigger. Gotham City is like New York to the 10th power. Well, this new Gotham City is like the old Gotham City to the 10th power. We're always trying to increase the scale. One of the things we tried to concentrate on is that it is a multilevel city, everything is just built up. Glen came up with the idea for the first episode of having a subway car that goes vertically rather than horizontally. The city is so high that you literally have to take a subway to get up to the next level. Things like that we were doing to try to make the show unique to itself."

APQ

Dennis Fischer



looking suit, which was stuck in the villain file and forgotten about. "I had always wanted to do an episode with a villain who had sound-based powers," said Timm. "I was in Alan Burnett's office and we were brainstorming, trying to come up with ideas for shows and villains, and I mentioned to him that I wanted to do a show where the climax was silent, that we had a villain whose powers were controlling sound, that he could negate sound. The whole climax of the episode would be absolutely silent."

"Then years later in the present, Alan was talking over ideas with his writers and mentioned my old idea of a sound villain and a silent climax, and Stan Berkowitz came up with that villain. We remembered the design that Glen had done and said, 'Oh yeah, that could be a sound suit.' We put the two of them together and *voila!*"

A TOUCH OF CURARE

Writer: Hilary Bader. **Director:** Dan Riba. **Guest voice:** Paul Winfield

When a scimitar-wielding assassin named Curare is hired to kill Sam Young (Paul Winfield), the district attorney who is also Commissioner Barbara Gordon's husband, Batman feels compelled to help out. Nice balance between the action-oriented sequences and some tense interplay between McGinnis, Wayne, and the former Batgirl, with only shaded intimations as to why the commissioner is now so adamant that superheroes should stay out of police business.

One of the most intriguing conflicts in the show is between McGinnis and Barbara Gordon. Commented Dini, "She doesn't feel this is a life for anybody, least of all a kid, yet she went through it herself around the same age. She's not one to badmouth it, but on the other hand she does know where that path leads. A lot of sad things can happen to somebody along the way."

Popular Science, National Geographic, Omni, and other scientific magazines. "What intrigues me are things that could be happening in a few years. We'll look at contemporary life, and that will prompt ideas, like when we were coming up with the idea for an upcoming episode called 'Splicers.' Today, a lot of kids are getting tattoos and then a lot of them are getting pierced, and a few are going beyond that and getting implants put in their heads — you look at some people nowadays and they've got like real spikes implanted under their skin or something. I started wondering where this was all going to wind up."

"As we progress in technology and keep moving forward, people will find newer and more exciting ways to abuse their bodies. I was thinking, what if you could do selective gene splicing on yourself? You could combine your DNA with that of another animal, and you could get slight augmentation on a part of your body. It's not like people turning themselves into animals, but what if you could somehow augment your fingernails so that they looked more like claws, or do something to your eyes to make them look more like cat eyes."

"I was thinking that would be a really good look for a street gang. So I took the bare bones of that idea and I handed that over to Evan Dorkin and Sarah Dyer and said, 'See what you can come up with,' and they came up with a pretty good sto-

ry about it. Things like that we want to keep in the series."

When the producers take a more satirical approach to their speculations, the result can be something like *BATMAN BEYOND*'s ubiquitous pseudo-CGI newscasters, depicted as stylized human figures with smiles permanently plastered across their faces. Said Dini, "Those were supposedly created in a computer to appeal to all different sorts of people and to look happy to everybody. They are of no defined background except human. They could be talky, smiley heads, except they are a little more human stylized. They are designed to be — in the world of the show — completely computer generated people."

"You look at news these days, and as soon as the news broadcasters can do that, I'm sure they will. You just have a happy face there, telling you the days news. They don't express personal opinions, they don't age."

Added Burnett, "They mostly give happy news. Even if it's sad and tragic news, they still find a way to make it more appealing, more listenable."

HOW TO BUILD A BAT

An episode of *BATMAN BEYOND* begins with the writers and producers coming up with story ideas. Commented Dini, "Frequently, Bruce Timm, Alan Burnett, Glen Murakami and I will all sit down and go over lists of what we want to do with the characters. Sometimes I'll bring in a story that I've fleshed out, and we'll all hand it around, or we'll sit in a conference and talk about what kind of stories we want to tell or what kind of villain we want to use, just interesting ideas. That's how it starts."

After the writers and producers agree what to do, then the concept will be developed as a story that is written as an outline or a script. "Or sometimes I'll hand the outline to another writer and have them develop it further," added Dini. "Because I'm usually reading scripts or working on scripts, it makes it sort of hard for me to sit and write it all myself, but I will work with other writers on them."

"Then, when I'm not generating story ideas, I'm going over storyboards, I'm going to recordings, just working on the various stages of production that each episode goes through. Then it falls into the artists' domain. Once the script is complete, and we've edited the script and recorded the script, the artists take it and do a storyboard. From there it goes to layout and animation, which is done overseas, with a Korean animation studio."

BATMAN BEYOND is blessed with a stable of writers who know the comic book characters and can handle them well. Said Dini, "We've got a staff of writers who for the most part have been with us over the last three years. When we started doing the *SUPERMAN* series, we had a new writer start with us at that

WELCOME TO THE WARS: The world of crime-fighting poses numerous tests for the ambitious teen, such as confronting the indefatigable assassin Curare (below) or discovering that your girlfriend is actually a member of the Royal Flush gang (right).



time named Robert Goodman, who initially wrote the first couple of Bizarro episodes for us. He worked out very well, so he's been with us all that time.

"There is also Hilary Bader, who has worked for a number of science fiction and fantasy genre shows, including *STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE* and *XENA*. She came to work with us on *SUPERMAN* around that time. There's Rich Fogel, who worked with Alan Burnett a few years back at Hanna-Barbera — they worked together on a number of shows. Rich has a fondness and affinity for superheroes, so Alan brought him over once we were in the thick of things with *SUPERMAN*. We also have Stan Berkowitz, who worked on the Superman character as Superboy in the live action, syndicated *SUPERBOY* series a few years back.

"In *SUPERMAN* and *BATMAN BEYOND*, we have used a pair of freelancers from New York: Evan Dorkin and Sarah Dyer. Evan is known in the comics community as the creator of *Milk and Cheese*, one of the funnier independent comic books out there. They wrote a number of *SUPERMAN* stories for us, and they've written a great *BATMAN BEYOND* for next season called 'Splicers,' which is a lot of fun."

According to Dini, one of the biggest challenges is to be careful not to fall into a rut and repeat what has been done before. "You always have to think that it's not the old *BATMAN* show. This is something I myself have to keep in mind as well as the other writers, and to that degree it's good that we read each other's scripts and we get together and talk about the show. So we catch each other.

"When I read, 'A group of criminals are robbing a bank.' I'll look at that and I'll go, 'Whoa, whoa, a bank? A money bank? Who needs money 40 years in the future?' They don't have money, everything is done on credit cards. We shouldn't deal with bank robberies any more.

"We point things like that out to each other so the show doesn't get stale or predictable or too convenient. As a writer, that's the big problem we run into: coming up with something that reads as too convenient. It plays well and it gets the show off, logically, but if you do that too many times, you give the impression of it being same-old, same-old."

Except for one newcomer, the directors of *BATMAN BEYOND* have worked with the pro-



ducers for many years on the original *BATMAN* or the later *SUPERMAN* series. Explained Dini, "Most of the directors came in as board artists who worked their way up, getting adjusted to the style, making refinements in it, working with Bruce Timm, and just having a good grasp of the show, the characters, the sensibilities. Pretty much all of our directors [Curt Geda, Butch Lukic, and Dan Riba] have worked up through the ranks.

"The directors are usually always present for recording an episode, but the actors primarily take their cues from Andrea Romano, our voice director. The way we do the recordings is that the people present are always the producers, Bruce, Alan, Glen or myself, and usually the writer of the specific episode, and the director. About six people, with Andrea Romano, who is our voice director, and Leslie Lamers who casts our show, and some of the people who work with the recording.

"We'll run through the show once with the actors so they get a sense of the show, and usually they get the script a day or two in advance so they can look it over if they want. We'll do a reading for the show once, and then we'll record the show and have some time for pick-ups. The whole process rarely takes over two and a half hours.

"We'll try and get as many of the cast members there as we can. One of the things that's happened over the years is that as we begin using more and more diverse talent on *BATMAN* and *SUPERMAN*, a lot of the actors are harder to get for a full session. They may have commitments elsewhere, or we may want a guest star who is not available to us, so we'll have to do a phone pick-up with them at some point. Usually we'll try and

DISAPPEARING INQUE

Writer: Stan Berkowitz. Director: Curt Geda. Guest voice: William H. Macy.

With the help of an infatuated lab worker, Inque escapes her frozen imprisonment and devises a plan to trap and kill both Batman and his elderly partner, Bruce Wayne.

Said Timm, "Writers always try to think of what happens to the villains at the end of a previous episode and ask, 'What happens then?' I wish they wouldn't think that way because of the continuity problems, but I'm sure that's how this episode came about. At the end of ['Black Out'] she was frozen into a big cube, so what happens next? They developed their story based on that, and we thought she was a neat character, that she worked really well. We'll be bringing her back next season."

ASCENSION

Writer: Robert Goodman. Director: Yukio Suzuki. Guest voice: Cary Elwes.

As Derek Powers' disease takes its toll on his emotional stability, the industrialist brings in his son to function as corporate figurehead. Of course, no sooner is Powers the Younger ensconced in the executive suite than he reveals how deeply the bloodline flows: first orchestrating his father's public exposure as Blight, then planning to kill the Old Man with Batman's unwitting help.

Blight's name was coined by storyboard artist James Tucker. "I don't think it actually looked like



what Blight eventually looked like," said Timm, "but we liked the name. It must have been Alan who came up with the idea of turning Derek Powers into Blight. Then for the look, it was based on the idea of Dr. Phosphorus, a mad scientist guy who had a glowing, see-through skin. We felt that would be a neat look, and it kind of ties in with the Batman mythos in a strange way." **AFQ**

accommodate people if we can, but for the most part we like to have everybody sitting there in the studio. It just builds up a nice rhythm going, and we always think it makes the shows sound better."

The animation for **BATMAN BEYOND** is provided by Korean studio Koko, formerly known as Dong Yang. Said Timm, "When we first started working with them back in 1991, they were basically a studio that had handled subcontracting work from Japanese studios. But [the founders of Koko] were looking to expand their horizons, and somehow they came to our attention. They said they would really like to give it a try, and we took a gamble on them. We gave them—I think it was episode three

"Sometimes the director will have to get together with a designer and/or me and Glen and do some brainstorming.

"Ideally, it would be great if our background designers and our character designers got on a show before it went to the storyboard guys, because it is always better to have a bunch of materials to work with rather than have [the storyboard artists] make stuff up as they go along. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way with all the overlap. Everybody's busy all the time, so we try to do main character design and get rough ideas of those right at the top. A lot of our storyboard guys are good artists in their own right, and sometimes they'll come up with their own character designs.

the script, so they have to be designed. Then we have to do turnarounds on them as well, which is basically a model sheet which has the characters from all different angles to animate from."

As the script gets storyboarded, the design crew works on it as well, designing the backgrounds and characters needed to tell the story. Commented Timm, "It's ideal to have a week or so before the board guys get it, so they can have some backgrounds to work off of and some character designs. Unfortunately, everyone is so busy working on five different things at once, it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes the board guys are literally drawing a board without knowing what the character is finally going to look like, so they are just roughing in stick figures, you know?

"All this stuff is happening at the same time. We are literally working on six or seven episodes in various stages of completion at any given time. Once the board is done, they hand it to the writers, producers, Glen, and myself. We all put notes on the board.

"The writers' notes are predictable: 'Well, this wasn't the way it was in the script.' Actually, they are not that bad about it, but sometimes the board guys have gone so far that they've actually really hurt the story by changing things, so I force them to put it back. Most of my notes are, 'Okay, so does this cut work? Is this going to drive us crazy in the editing room when the show comes back or is this effect too hard to do?' Everybody is trying to do really spectacular special effects, but because of the time and budget restraints, I just know the effects are not going to

come out nearly as well as they expect it to, so we'll scale back."

Then the work goes back to the design staff so they can create all the final character and background designs based on the story boards. "We'll pick a number of background designs to be painted as background painting keys to ship over to the Orient," said Timm. "Put it all together and then ship it off to Korea, and then it comes back probably four or five months later. I'll sit down with the editor and director and we'll cut the show. I'll sit down with the composers and the sound effects guys, and we'll watch the show together and say, 'Okay, this is where we should start the music here. This should be romantic music or this should be really intense scary music, or whatever.' We usually have anywhere between two or three weeks to put it on the air."

All the post production must be completed quickly, requiring the talented crew



of the original **BATMAN** series—and they just did a really good job on it. Eventually, they got so good and they are so fast that they've become our main suppliers. On **BATMAN BEYOND**, they are the only studio we've used on the series so far. For the 39 new episodes, it's an awful lot of work in a short amount of time, but they say they can handle it, and we hope that they can.

"What's great about them is that they have literally gotten better and better throughout the years. They are constantly trying to improve their own skills and pay close attention to what we want, and they just deliver."

However, before the animation studio can get to work, the script, once it is put on the schedule and is assigned to a director, goes through the design and storyboard departments. "Sometimes the directors will have a real specific idea of what they want, and sometime they won't," noted Timm.

"James Tucker is one of our main storyboard guys. He started as a character designer here and moved over to doing storyboards, but he's still good at character designs and he's really fast. What's really great about James is that he won't just come up with one design and then give you five slight variations of it, he'll come up with five radically different designs so you have a good range of which way to go. It's real easy to narrow it down. He's a real good artist and has real good instincts on this kind of stuff. A lot of the other storyboard artists do that too."

Once the story is boarded, the work is re-examined because, as Timm explained, "There are always things that you can't think about upfront. Sometimes a storyboard artist will put in a sequence that isn't there in the script, and we'll say, 'Okay, that's really great,' but suddenly we've got these five extra characters that weren't in

often to work around the clock to get the shows on the air by the promised airdate. Nevertheless, the consistently high quality of **BATMAN BEYOND** attests to the production team's understanding of storytelling and superheroics.

A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

Alan Burnett remembered that when he was doing **SUPER FRIENDS**, he wanted to include Jack Kirby's character of Darkseid, one of the inspirations for Lucas' Darth Vader. But despite having toned the character down so that he wouldn't be too gruesome-looking for the tiny tots, Burnett was told that he couldn't use the villain because, "his name was spelled with an 'ei,' which would offend our German viewers. That's how they put it! That's the kind of weirdness we were working with in the '80s."

Noted Dini, "I'd say over the last ten years or so, a lot of those restrictions haven't exactly fallen by the wayside, but they have eased up a lot. At one point, the thing that was most distressing about the restrictions in animated television wasn't that the censor was objecting to specific bits of action here and there, but would just get on a bandwagon over the intent of an entire episode. It couldn't be the intent of a criminal to be out to hurt somebody else. They had to be out to threaten somebody or out to steal something, or the heroes couldn't take direct physical action to stop him. They had to use some sort of action that would allow the villain to fall prey to their own devices, or something."

"Once you get into something like that, you know, that's ridiculous. No kid wants to watch that. They want to see a hero out solving a problem directly. You can't cushion these things enough if you start doing stuff like that, so that was the thing that was great about Fox early on when we started doing the show over there."

"We were happy to see it stay the same at Kids' WB. In every situation, the standards and practices people appreciated the integrity of the show that we wanted to do. They understood that we were doing an action-adventure show, that the action sometimes got a little intense, and yet it was true to the character and his world. They may have problems here and there with specific

actions. We're usually happy to change that if we look at it and think we're going too far."

Bruce Timm agreed. "The censors have been really, really good to work with," he said. "When we got to the WB, the broadcast standards and practices people were a lot easier to deal with than even Fox,

so we got kind of spoiled. We could make the shows really, really intense, and we wouldn't get stomped on."

"Because of recent events, such as the Columbine massacre, the network is very, very nervous about how intense the action is in our series. Specifically, they are concerned that we don't have too much gunplay, too much negative ambiance or too intense violence. They are making us pull back a little bit, but we try to please ourselves anyways. We're not in the business of twisting kids. We try to keep aware that young people are watching the show as well, so we try not to make it anything we would not let our own children watch. They haven't been unreasonable."

"Alan always likes to say that when he worked on **SUPER FRIENDS** 15 years ago, characters were not even allowed to make a fist, much less throw a punch. We've gone a long way since then. For most of the stuff — prior to the tragedy in Littleton — the biggest complaint was about sexuality. I have a number of really, really excellent artists on staff who just excel at drawing pretty girls, and I have a lot of really red-blooded males doing the storyboards for the series, so they truly like to push the envelope in terms of good girl art."

"The censors usually say, 'The sexuality in this scene is a little bit inappropriate for children,' or, 'Could we please lengthen the

BATMAN BEYOND

MAIN MODELS

TERRY MCGINNIS

FINAL

JUL 14 1998

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NOTES:

SHADOW OF THE BAT: For Terry McGinnis, on-the-job training includes a rocket-powered batsuit (far left) and constant monitoring by an enigmatic millionaire. Above and left: Model sheets for McGinnis and Bruce Wayne.

girl's skirt a little bit in this sequence?' We usually say, 'Darn it, but okay.'"

BATMAN BEYOND CONNECTS WITH ITS AUDIENCE

The Kids' WB has really been on a roll lately, with **BATMAN BEYOND** debuting to good numbers

and then shooting up to incredible numbers. The WB then brought in **POKEMAN**, which got even more incredible numbers, making the network number one on Saturday morning.

Dini just hopes audiences like the series. "I hope they like the first season enough to tune into the second season," he said. "I hope that they are excited about seeing new adventures with the characters. That's about it. As an audience member myself, there are certain shows that I like, and when I know there are new episodes coming, I just make a point of watching it, enjoying it. I might tape it and look at it again — it's purely an enjoyment thing. I don't know that it makes a big impact. I just think it's a lot of fun for them to watch."

Commented Burnett, "The interesting thing about this show is that we make it up as we go along. We have no bible. We all work together and we all toss ideas and it's a very organically produced show. We find things we like and situations, relationships, ideas for villains. We find new ideas all the time. We work on them together so the show has an evolution to it that is unpredictable."

Said Murakami, "I like the new show because it is more fun. I like Terry not being as depressing as Bruce Wayne. I think the contrast is really interesting. It was calculated to make the show a little bit more lively, a little bit more fun." With a couple of comic book spin-offs, rumors about a direct-to-video feature, and enough episodes to be syndicated five days a week, **BATMAN BEYOND**'s future seems assured for some time to come.

AFQ

BATMAN BEYOND

MAIN MODELS

BRUCE WAYNE

385-350

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BATMAN BEYOND

INFLUENCES & EVIL

While BATMAN BEYOND positions itself as a bold, new glimpse into the world of the Dark Knight, it cannot entirely escape comparisons with the past. Like the oversized artifacts that Bill Finger used to decorate the Batcave, some influences stand out like sore thumbs, while others are far more subtle. Though BATMAN BEYOND owes a debt to the past, it does not content itself with simple rehashes of what's gone before. Rather, it tries to take past characters and concepts into interesting, original directions.

Noted producer Paul Dini, "The thing that worked so well for the old BATMAN [series] was the psychological motivation. When you have villains that are defined by their psychological quirks—in the old series, that would have been the Riddler and Two-Face—those characters always work well. We look and see how we can apply that to our contemporary rogues gallery.

"Blight is a good example. On the outside, he appears to be the smiling, benevolent face of corporate America, but inside you see he is dark and twisted and toxic. He can barely keep it in any longer.

"When you start thinking

about the characters like that, then they begin to take on a little bit of a twisted psychological resonance. Apart from being characters, they become the personification of a deeper psychological manifestation. Those characters are always fun to write. You're personifying a psychological quirk."

One of the quirkiest and most popular of the Batman characters was the Joker (brilliantly voiced by STAR WARS' Mark Hamill). BATMAN BEYOND pays homage to the Joker's influence by having his larger-than-life criminal activities and style serve as the inspiration for a futuristic gang of cycle punks. The Jokerz first appear in the pilot episode, harassing and shaking down subway passengers, riding motorcycles, and threatening Terry McGinnis outside a rock club. They are readily identifiable by their clown make-up, purple clothes, and dubious taste in humor.

Commented producer-designer Bruce Timm, "Glen [Murakami] and I were actually against the idea because of how much we were trying not to do things like that, but at the same time we realized that it made sense. Again, it's a science fiction extrapolation of kids who wear Charles Manson T-shirts.

Kids in our present day will do that, they'll think, 'Charles Manson was a psycho-killer, so he's cool.' In Batman's futuristic world, it's the same sort of thing. The Joker is long since gone, dead and buried or whatever happened to him. So they pattern their whole look on the Joker.

"There is a precedent for that in things like AKIRA and THE WARRIORS. We tried to make them kind of a joke; we didn't want to take them too seriously. They are like any gang; they are scary, but they're pretty pathetic.

While the two-bit punk approach did have its uses — especially in helping to position former Batman Bruce Wayne in his Brave New World ("We're the Jokerz, man!" shrieks one punk; "Sure you are," sneers the guy who knows these kids would have been piranha bait for the real article) — it also had its problems. Said Timm, "We have an episode [in the new season] where Batman and Ten from the Royal Flush gang are on the run from these Jokerz, and because we [originally] set [the Jokerz] up to be such losers and buffoons, we had to work hard to make them a serious threat. They had to be scarier than another group of gangsters

that they were caught in the middle of. We had to pull all kinds of weird tricks to do that, but it worked."

What tricks were those? "First of all," said Timm, "we increased the number of [gang members] — there's like a hundred Jokerz here. Then there's this crowd of them outside of the hideout, and they're doing a modern-day version of a cock fight. They've got a Splicer guy on a leash and they're baiting him and doing all sorts of horrible things... It's a kids' show, but we tried to make them more menacing."

Another interesting variant is Inque, who is the new show's version of Clayface, the shape-shifting creep who can mold his features into any configuration. Her flying oil-slick tentacles also seem inspired by a Japanese anime staple: the tentacled demon. Commented Timm, "Yeah, she's kind of our version of Clayface. She's a shapeshifter, but her powers work differently from Clayface's, her motivation is different, her look is different. Whereas Clayface was a walking mudpile, she's a living oil slick. We handed that to the writers and said come up with a character based on this drawing."

One of the main characters

of the first season was corporate exec Derek Powers, who often came on like Lex Luthor with a shock of white hair. Noted Dini, "That's what you come up with when you create these corporate characters. They all tend to be cut from the same cloth. We don't want to repeat ourselves directly. Derek isn't quite as high tech as Luthor was, but he's probably a bit more overtly evil. Lex, for all his faults and his evil nature, had a degree of honor to him that Powers just doesn't have."

On the other hand, the robot in "Gotham Golem" seems to owe more to anime, particularly the useful robots of the PATLABOR series. Timm, though, disagreed: "Not PATLABOR per se. I hope you quote me accurately on this — I've taken a lot of heat over the years for saying I don't really like Japanese animation. That's not really true. I actually like a lot of Japanese animation, but I'm not so into it as some other people are. A lot of people in our crew are really, really into it."

"It's like Sturgeon's law: 90 percent of everything is crap. That kind of applies to everything, even Japanese animation. I can appreciate the artistry in movies like AKIRA and even GHOST IN THE SHELL, even though I find GHOST a little bit tedious. Glen and I are big Miyazaki fans. Love all of Miyazaki's movies."

Regarding the PATLABOR movies, Timm admitted that he and Murakami have seen them. "They are interesting, but they are almost a little bit too realistic for what we're doing. It's almost like HILL STREET BLUES meets ROBOCOP kind of stuff."

Noted Murakami, "[The Japanese] style of animation is different. We try to take as much influence from them as we can. It's like anything, like the BATMAN property: we take as much of it as we can, and the rest of it we throw out. So it is with Japanese animation."

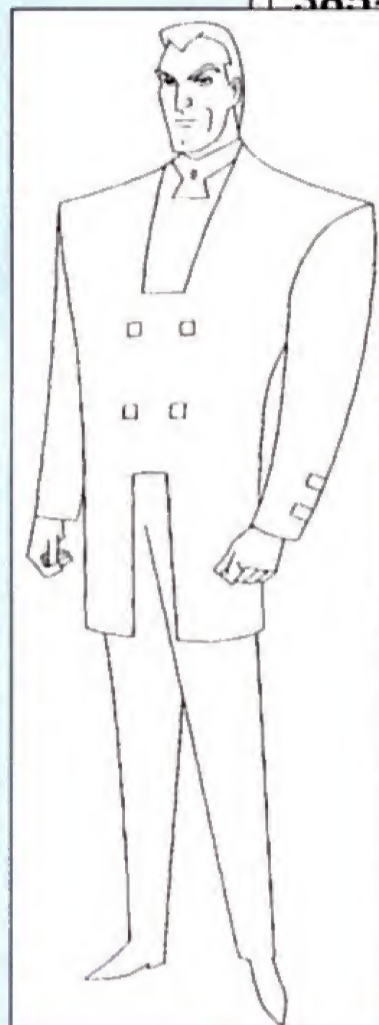
"There are differences between how we make cartoons and how the Japanese make cartoons. I don't think people see the difference. Sometimes when we say something about Japanese animation, it is more from a technical level or the cost level."

I don't think people realize that with AKIRA, the quality level [is not typical for Japanese animation]."

To clarify these differences, Timm noted that the Japanese animation style was created, "because they were doing them so low budget. They came up with all those interesting cheats. They rendered characters that don't really move a lot, but they just slide the background behind them slightly. The eyes move and maybe the hair moves or something. [For example], GHOST IN THE SHELL, the whole movie is that way. It's really detailed drawings, but they don't really move a whole lot. That's fine, we appreciate the aesthetic of that, but that's not what we do. We went the opposite way. We probably have similar budgets, but western audiences expect more movement, more excitement."

"Not only that, but when we first started, literally, we were told to make it a full animation show. We weren't allowed to make it limited animation. We'd probably have done more limited animation if we had been allowed to. When we first started the show back in 1991, that was literally an edict from the studio: make this high-end, full animation, none of this cheap TV limited animation stuff. Knowing that we were going to have so much full animation, we came up with a really simplistic animation style that's more design-oriented but less detail-oriented, if that makes sense."

In other words, there is a lot more movement in the BATMAN BEYOND episodes than in typical Japanese anime, with characters swinging their whole bodies in every direction. However, the characters themselves are not given the meticulous detail one associates with the anime style, where the design captures the attention more than the movement (often little more than moving lips on a static



BATMAN BEYOND

MAIN MODELS

BLIGHT

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NOTES:



POWER'S PLAY: A Lex Luthor without the underlying sense of honor (and how's that for splitting hairs?). Derek Powers (left) only reveals more of his true colors when he becomes the supercriminal Blight (above).

background).

Another element that speaks of an outside influence are the CGI newscasters, with their see-through heads and stylized smiling mouths. Their punchy, happy-news

approach reflects the Media-Break approach in Paul Verhoeven's ROBOCOP, which proved a quick, effective way of conveying exposition.

"You know, I don't know if they were [influenced by ROBOCOP] or not," said writer-producer Alan Burnett. "We've done a lot of stuff where we've seen other elements in other science fiction and stuff that we weren't cognizant of. People have been saying that the Jokerz were a remnant of the gangs in A CLOCKWORK ORANGE and AKIRA, and we were just making a gang."

As Paul Dini admitted, "You can look upon a lot of our villains as having their origin in the older villains. The character called Spellbinder comes from the same family as the Mad Hatter. We've only really featured one of the old villains, Mr. Freeze, [though] Bane [had a cameo appearance] in his old, old age... which isn't all that good for him. That's all you'll ever see of him."

"Ra's Al Ghul is there somewhere, and we haven't dealt with him yet, though we have a couple of ideas that we'll hold back on until we figure out what

we want to do for sure," Dini noted. "For the most part, we're going to hit new villains in this series and not have resurrections going on."

Of course, some of the correlations are not so direct. In "Dead Man's Hand," McGinnis falls for bad girl Melanie, who is part of the criminal, Royal Flush family gang. His attraction to her reminds Bruce Wayne of his own attraction to bad girl Selena Kyle, better known as Catwoman, and this connection gives resonance to Terry's own muddled feelings for this new woman in his life.

"Inspiration comes from all over," said Dini. "Sometimes the artists will come up with a cool drawing of a bad guy, and we say, 'That's great. We've got to find a place for that in there.' One of the artists came up with this drawing of a woman carrying a scimitar sword. I thought, *Boy, she's great! She would make a perfect assassin-type character.* So we worked her into the story as an assassin."

"We have a character coming up in the second season who has tattoos all over his body, and yet he has a cybernetic spine. He looks like a high tech hunter, so we're putting him as someone who is stalking Batman as the ultimate quarry. A cool drawing will spark an idea. Sometimes we read something in the paper and say if we can just take that into the realm of a cartoon, we can get a new villain out of that." **AFQ**

Dennis Fischer

REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA

Cross-dressing teens. Secret conspiracies. Sapphic love. In the world of Utena Tenjou, classes are the least of a student's worries.

by L. JAGI
LAMPLIGHTER

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a little princess. She was very sad, for her mother and father had died. Before this princess appeared a traveling prince upon a white horse. His bearing was regal and he had a kind smile. The prince enveloped the princess in a rose-scented embrace and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Little one," he said, "bearing up alone under such sorrow, never lose your strength and nobility, even when you are grown. I give you this to remember this day by. We will meet again. This ring will lead you to me."

Maybe the ring was meant to be an engagement ring. This was all well and good, but so impressed was she by the prince that the princess made up her mind to become a prince herself.

But was this such a good idea?

So begins SHOJO KAKUMEI UTENA, (REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA), a fascinating, new Japanese television series that combines the beauty of shojo (girls) anime with rousing sword-fights and intriguing mystery. An eye-pleasing, intricate work with touches of

slapstick and dark fantasy, REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA pushes the boundaries of the expected while delivering a delightful and engaging story.

SWEET VALLEY HIGH MEETS HIGHLANDER

Amidst a thousand images of roses, the students of Ohtori Academy live and study. One girl, Utena Tenjou, is a junior high-school student who just happens to insist on wearing a boy's uniform. She is adored by the younger girls, outwits her bossy teachers, and beats all the boys at basketball. Yet, she considers herself a normal girl... a normal girl who wants to grow up to be a prince and rescue princesses.

When Kendo team captain Saionji humiliates her best friend, Utena comes to the rescue and challenges him to a duel, unaware that she is trespassing upon the strange world of the school's powerful student council. When Utena defeats Saionji, she discovers that she has become the current victor of the secret duel run by the student council and has gained...a bride?

Sweet, unassuming Anthony Himemiya, whose round glasses emphasize her enormous, green eyes, explains that she is the Rose Bride and must do the will of the victor of the duels. She and Utena are now en-

gaged, Anthony says, and other students wearing rose crest rings, much like the one Utena received from the prince she remembers from her childhood, will be coming to challenge her. If she refuses to duel, the powerful student council will see that she is removed from the academy.

Suddenly, Utena finds herself knee-deep in intrigue and mystery. Why are the members of the student council constantly challenging her to duels? Why must sweet Anthony Himemiya submit her will to that of the duel's victor? And, who is End Of The World, the mysterious individual or group orchestrating the duels through cryptic messages delivered to the student council?

The 13 episodes currently available in English through Central Park Media answer none of the above questions. Yet, the presentation of this mystery is so charming, cheerful, and so odd that REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA leaps almost instantly to the list of anime favorites.

WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR MS.

PRINCE (right): Utena Tenjou has sworn to replicate the nobility that changed her life so long ago. But is Anthony Himemiya the princess in need of "Prince" Utena's protection?



PRINCES AND OTHER IMAGINARY CREATURES

No one in UTENA is quite what they seem. Angry, villainous characters have more tender sides, while even the sweetest characters conceal dark secrets — all except Utena Tenjou, who is carried forward by the pure force of her convictions. Her bravery and determination makes it easy to identify with her cause... even if that cause may seem, at times, absurd.

In an interview just after the release of the first two episodes, director Kunihiko Ikuhara said of his heroine, "Utena is someone I wish I could be. I want to be a fool. I want to be ignorant. I want to be naive... To put it nicely, this is why Utena is naive and foolish. She speaks of her Prince and the like — to our sensibilities, we think of that as stupid. I want to show that this sensibility of ours, that leads us to think of that as stupid, is itself absurd."

Rachael Lillis, who provided the voice for Utena on the English dub summed up the character she portrayed by saying, "I think the character of Utena is about honor. She's a hopeless romantic, but she just happens to be able to kick some serious butt with a sword. She stands up for those she cares about."

Of Utena's swordfighting, she said, "Utena seems to be at peace with herself. She isn't skilled at all with a sword. She's forceful and earnest in the duels, like her opponents, but she doesn't seem to be trained at it. The other duelists are trained. Is Utena able to defeat them because they bring a tragic flaw with them into the arena? It seems that this 'flaw' trips up [each] opponent, no matter how trained at dueling the person is."

"People kept saying that she seemed like a tomboy, but I thought she seemed pretty feminine. I don't think gender should be underestimated or overestimated. Someone can be perfectly feminine, even if they don't do everything in a socially or stereotypically feminine way." Utena, who declares that — even though she dresses like a boy — she is still a perfectly normal girl looking for a perfectly normal boy, would probably agree.

If Utena is naive but forceful, Anthy Himemiya is her opposite: passive but wise. With her subservient manner, Anthy gives a whole new meaning to the phrase Trophy Bride. In the English dub, Utena calls her Anthy. However, in the Japanese, she calls her Himemiya, a word meaning "shrine princess," making it more obvious from the beginning that Anthy may be the princess "Prince Utena" wishes to save.

Anthy is dark-skinned, with wide glasses and a Hindu caste mark on her forehead. Her only friend is a monkey/chimpunk-like creature called Chu Chu. She is constantly being slapped, if not by her boorish "fiancee" Saionji, then by the three waspish girls who serve council president Touga's conniving sister Nanami. Yet, she does nothing to defend herself. One of the most satisfying moments in the first 13 episodes is when Utena, temporarily teleported into Anthy's body, retaliates by slapping her attackers back. (The satisfaction of this scene is followed closely by a scene where Saionji punts the ubiquitous Chu Chu.)

REVOLUTIONARY GIRL

UTENA is fundamentally about the friendship between Utena and Anthy, and about how far friends are willing to go to for each other. Despite the provocative looks they give each other in the opening titles and the ubiquitous rose images, (in Japan, roses are a symbol for lesbians) their friendship remains platonic throughout the series. Addressing the issue of their relationship, sho-jo fan Kim Kindya said, "Though some may regard it as having homoerotic overtones, what with Anthy being Utena's 'Bride' and all, there is actually a Japanese cultural thing where two girls can develop a strong emotional bond that almost borders on the romantic. There's a word for this kind of intense relationship [*Doseiai*]. This sort of thing used to happen in Victorian times in the West, too — women would sometimes write almost passionate (though not sexual) letters to each other, declaring these deep emotional bonds. Again, the relationship wasn't quite lesbian (especially since... Queen Victoria didn't even believe lesbians existed — women weren't supposed to have sex drives). It was just this really intense bond. I think this is also the kind of bond we're supposed to be seeing parodied in the old PROJECT A-KO movies (especially the first one). I think our modern, or Western, society is very quick to sexualize relationships, and many Americans can't quite wrap their brains around this kind of pairing."

After Utena and Anthy, the most important character in the Student Council Saga (the tale that comprises the first 13 episodes) is student council president, Touga Kiryuu. Actor and sound designer Crispin Freeman, who provided the voice for Touga, explained, "I had done some research before I auditioned for the part, but I had not found out everything."

I thought Touga was basically a nice guy, like Allan Schezar in VISIONS OF ESCFLOWNE, so I read him like that. I thought he was more mature than the other characters and lacked the psychological weaknesses present in the others. When we came to the scene where he burns Saionji's exchange diary, I realized, 'Oh, dear god, he's a snake in the grass!'

"Touga's just as bad at the rest," Crispin concluded. "He's got psychological damage, too. He's just a master at manipulating it. My favorite cut of his was where he and Miki are watching Utena, and he says, so casually, 'You don't see it? I guess I'm the only one who can.' It sends shivers up my spine."

FREE BRIDE: Anthy Himemiya (below in school uniform with constant companion Chu Chu and right in the garb of the Rose Bride) is one key to the mysterious organization End of the World. But even she doesn't understand her full role in the power struggle that will sweep classmate Utena into its midst.



Rachael Lillis added, "Touga burning Saionji's diary was the first time you can really see beneath his calm, noble veneer. I was shocked when I first saw that scene, because Touga meant for all of this to happen. He manipulated everyone to get closer to the Rose Bride. Up until then, I thought that Touga was the only character who wasn't a wounded soul. But it turns out that he longs for something just as much as everyone else. The duels have a way of turning longings into weaknesses."

Other characters of importance include Wakaba, Utena's best friend — the one for whom she fights the duel with Saionji; Saionji, the callous kendo team champion who apparently actually loves Anthy Himemiya; Nanami, Touga's maniacally devoted sister who adores her "Big Brother!" and does not want anyone else to get near him; cool calculating Jury Arisugawa who does not believe in miracles and carries a secret in the locket she wears about her neck; and Miki Kaoru, the junior high, piano-playing genius who keeps the minutes for the student council meetings with his ever-clicking stopwatch.

Then, there is Akio, the brown-skinned, white pony-tailed brother of Anthy who appears for the first time in Episode 13. Akio's name is derived from the Morning Star. So is Lucifer's, which tells you almost everything you need to know about Akio.

THE STUDENT COUNCIL SAGA

The first 13 episodes are known as the Student Council Saga. The seven duels fought during this Saga all have names: Amitie (friendship), Choix (choice), Raison (reason), Amour (love), Adoration, Conviction, Soi (self). Episode 13 alludes to the 21st duel, a duel named "Revolution," which is finally fought in episode 38. The names of the intervening duels are not provided.

During the Student Council Saga, Utena fights each of the student council members, plus Touga's sister Nanami. As each character faces her, we, the viewers, are given glimpses into their subconscious and shown how incidents from their past continue to influence their current lives. Miki has lost his precious relationship with his twin sister. Jury is in love with her girlfriend Shiori. Saionji recalls the day he and Touga found a girl (young Utena) hiding in a coffin, and he could do nothing to comfort her — he is convinced that Touga showed that girl something eternal to draw her out again. Nanami's dark secret is that she once drowned the kitten she gave her big brother as a gift, because the kitten drew his attention away from her. Only Touga seems immune from this fascination with the past. Yet, when he finally loses to Utena in Episode 12, he spends the entire next Saga (Episodes 14 to 24) sulking in his room. Each of these characters has become mired in their past and seems unable to escape

from their own memories.

Only the first 13 episodes is currently available in America. Rachael Lillis explained, "There are 39 episodes of REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA. Central Park Media bought 13 of them, with an option to pick up the rest. If the first 13 sell well, they plan to bring over the rest. For now, CPM plans to wait and see. I hope they continue. So far, we've really seen 12 episodes. The 13th episode is mainly a series of flash backs"

NANAMI AND THE ELEPHANTS — THE LIGHTER SIDE OF UTENA

Every third or fourth UTENA episode is a Nanami episode. During these episodes, the progression of the plot is put aside in favor of slapstick humor. Nanami, Touga's little sister, attempts one goofy strategy after another to draw attention to herself while humiliating Utena and Anthy. Many of these episodes involve animals, sometimes very exotic animals, such as elephants, octopi, and mongooses — animals that tend to be friendly to Anthy, but hostile to Nanami. It is hinted that Nanami is cursed to be attacked by animals, perhaps because of the incident in her childhood where she drowned the kitten.

Another bit of oddness in UTENA is Miki's stopwatch. Miki keeps the minutes for the student council meetings. Apparently, he keeps them in the most strict sense and not just during the meetings. Analysis of the times appearing on the stopwatch show that he is timing the length of talks that occur just before he snaps it. Usually he is timing speeches by Touga Kiryuu. His most interesting measurement, however, is of the pregnant silence after a telling comment regarding drowned cats.

THE DARKER SIDE OF SWEET VALLEY

The first saga, the Student Council Saga, is ideal for a high school audience, (though not *just* for a high school audience.)



BEAUTY ONLY SKIN DEEP: Student council president Touga Kiryuu starts out a seeming ally, but soon reveals a darker, more manipulative side to his personality.

It has everything a young girl could desire: a spirited heroine, a sweet girl to defend, a tall elegant hero who, while surrounded by other girls, stops to glance back at the heroine, indicating that he cares for her the most. It's pure high school romance! The later sagas, however, go where few high school romances dare, touching upon homoerotic love, incest, and, worst of all, from the point of view of high school romances, the sexual seduction of the innocent heroine by the villain.

"UTENA is only palatable to the American idea of what is suitable for TV through the first 13," said voice actor Crispin Freeman, "After that, it just gets too dark. Akio has sex with everyone: Utena, Anthy, Touga, even Saionji. Utena finds out and then she sleeps with him again."

Gender rolls in UTENA push the edges of the envelope. Utena dresses like a boy and wants to be a prince, though she claims that she is a normal girl underneath. Wakaba insists on pretending Utena is her

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REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA

Rituals and Invocations

*"Heroically, with bravery,
I'll go on with my life.*

*But if the two of us should
get split up, by whatever
means... Take my revolution*

*I will shed my clothes and
strip myself bravely, like roses
whirling in freedom.*

*Even if I have to separate
the two of us, I will change the
world."*

— From *Rinbu-Revolution*
(*Round Dance-Revolution*)

Opening theme to
**REVOLUTIONARY
GIRL UTENA**

There's more to **REVO-
LUTIONARY GIRL
UTENA** than meets the
eye. In particular, chants, cho-
ruses, and music that relies on
the sound of the words as part
of the instrumental effect all
contribute to the enigmatic
mood being spun by director
Kunihiko Ikuhara. Together,
this collection of sound and rit-
ual creates a
mood of mys-
tery, a sense
that the truth
may wait just
around the
corner — if
we can only
comprehend
the varied and
scattered clues.

One of the
unique ways
Ikuhara
achieves his
evocative ef-
fects is through
repetition. The
music-video-
like, spiral-
staircase se-
quence that

accompanies Utena's ascents to
the dueling arena, the ritualized
invocation that prefaces each
meeting of the student council,
the little plays put on by the
Shadow Girls are all reprised
numerous times throughout the
series. If merely described, the
idea of repetitive chunks of ani-
mation with little or no modifi-

opening of the
forest gate and
Utena's spiral
staircase ascent
to the dueling
arena — with
its strange lyr-
ics about "bap-
tismal records" and the "dark-

**The theatre, gifted
characters, a
phantasmic reality.**

**Operating table, a
shipwreck, pure
drama...**

**Spira mirabilis, still
spiraling, transforming,
in the vortex.**

**Spira mirabilis, in
Scipio's dream.**

Spira Mirabilis Theatre
J. A. Seazer

came pop-
u l a r
enough to
have sever-
al records
released;
beyond
that, he has
stuck to the
Japanese
under-
ground
music
scene.

How did
Seazer's
work come

to grace **UTENA**? In an
interview released just af-
ter the appearance of the
first two episodes, director
Ikuhara said, "As for
Seazer's choruses, I've
liked them ever since I
heard them at *Tenjou Saji-
ki* [a theatre troupe] as a
teenager. If you ask me, it
was odd that everyone re-
acted in surprise. Some
people even said that they
laughed, thinking it was
supposed to be a gag. I
thought about what [the

lyrics] meant, since they seemed
so natural to my sensibilities. I
think they probably laughed at
those Japanese words, which
sound like a potpourri of fos-
silized words. Which means, I
think, that they have a fixed idea
that choruses are normally not
like this."

The *Tenjou Sajiki* theatre
group? Could this be the origin
of Utena Tenjou's name? Very
likely.

Each duel Utena fights has
its own Seazer piece to accom-
pany it. The music is both mys-
terious and melodic, with an en-



**Natures light, mosaic
light, child of daybreak,
the angel Lucifer.**

**Apocalyptic light, Michael's
light, Child of darkness,
androgynous.**

**Fire's light, heavenly light,
Heirarchia of the heavens.**

**Illusory light, eternal
light, phantasmic
deception, capricious
birth.**

**Nyx, Erebus, Uranos,
Thanatos.**

*Angelic Creation,
Namely Light*
J. A. Seazer

c a t i o n
sounds dull,
if not down-
right repul-
sive. The fact
that it works
so well is a
tribute to
Ikuhara and
his produc-
tion team.

The eerie
song, *Absol-
ute Divine
Apocalypse*,
that accom-
panies the

ness of light," is the work of
musician J. A. Seazer. Seazer,
who was born in 1948, spent
part of his youth living on the
streets as he tried to make his
way as a musician. His break fi-
nally came when he got a
chance to play the drums for a
theatre troupe. This led to a life-
long career composing music
for plays and other theatrical
works. He became known for
writing music with stream-of-
consciousness lyrics, where the
sound of the words were as im-
portant, or more so, than the
lyrics. In the Seventies, he be-

ting beat. Where the words are translated, they prove to be a stream of surrealistic, hauntingly-familiar images conjuring up an implication of unrevealed secrets. A few examples of Seazer's work are enough to demonstrate their unique yet evocative nature.

References to prehistoric epochs, the ancient Roman work

many in partnership with Toshiro Yabuki as the producer.

Repetitive auditory ornamentations go beyond those found in UTENA's music. Amongst the most significant is the student councils' invocation. This speech accompanies the student councils' elevator ascent to the tower balcony, where they hold their meetings and from

student council members caged by the bars of the elevator makes the point more poignant.

The last of the evocative, re-occurring sequences is the Shadow Girls, two silhouettes with zany hairstyles who chant in unison while prattling on about some aspect of the story. These girls, who fill the same role as a Greek chorus, com-

talk to me via radio waves...almost every day."

What is Planet Kashira? The Shadow Girls' begin many of their appearances with the phrase "*Kashira, Kashira, Gozonji Kashira.*" *Kashira*, a Japanese word meaning "boss" or "head," takes on a whole new meaning when used by a female. It becomes a tag word that

**If it does not break
out of its shell, the
chick will die without
being born.
We are the chick; the
world is our egg.
If we do not crack the
world's shell, we will
die without ever being
born.
Smash the world's
shell - for the
revolution of the
world!**

Touga's Invocation
from **REVOLUTIONARY
GIRL UTENA**



**The bird struggles
itself out of the egg.
The egg is the world.
Whoever wants to be
born, must destroy the
world.
The bird flies to God.
The God is named
Abraxas.**

Damian
Herman Hesse
(Translated by
Rick Wynn)

Scipio's Dream, and the old gods Nyx (Night), Erebus, Uranos, and Thanatos (Death) evoke a sense of Illuminati-like mystery; it's as if proper analysis of the lyrics might shed some light on the nature of the power to revolutionize the world, the power sought by the duelists. The constant reference to theatres hints that the whole thing might be an illusion (a possibility also supported by later developments in the plot.)

Seazer's is not the only intriguing music in UTENA, nor is it the only music to hint at secrets to come. The words of *Rinbu-Revolution*, the opening theme song, support the series' final revelations better than does much of the initial plot. The song is also a hit with fans, who voted it "Best Theme Song" in a recent readers' poll by *Animage* (Japan's foremost anime magazine). *Rinbu-Revolution* was composed by Toshiro Yabuki with words and vocals by Masami Okui, a popular singer who has released at least six albums to date through King Records,

which they watch the duels. As the elegant figures of Jury, Miki, and Touga appear in silhouette within the structure of an old-fashion elevator, Touga Kiryuu's voice delivers the speech that inspires the student council's motives and actions. This speech, which describes "breaking the world's shell," is said to be inspired by a passage from the Hermann Hesse novel *Demian*.

Hesse, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is a German author known for writing novels exploring the individual's search for spiritual fulfillment outside the confinements of a strict society. In *Demian*, a Faust-like tale filled with themes from Jungian psychology, a young man must choose between an ordinary existence or a life of chaotic sensuality, a choice not so different from the one Utena must make. In both cases, the speeches imply the ruthlessness with which those who have departed from the confines of society justify their need to do so. The image of the

ment upon the plot and fill in certain details. Unlike the ascension sequence and the student councils' elevator ride, the Shadow Girls present a different shadow-play each time they make an appearance. At first, their performance is directly related to the plot — a discussion of an upcoming duel or of a school dance. As the series goes on, however, their shadow plays become more allegorical. Sometimes the relevance of these allegories is blatant, while at other times, it is downright obscure.

In episode 12, the Shadow Girls declare that they are tired of "doing what is normal for others," and depart in a spaceship. (Not to worry, in episode 13, their space ship can be seen returning, and they are soon be up to their old tricks again.)

In the interview quoted above, director Ikuhara gives us some hint of where they are going. He said, "I feel each of the characters is my alter ego. The Shadow Play Girls are my friends. Those girls come from Planet Kashira. And they often

makes a statement into a question. The Central Park Media dub now available in America translates the full line as "Did you know? Did you know? Have you heard the news?" A more accurate translation might read, "I wonder. I wonder. Do you know what I wonder?" Thus, the Shadow Girls might be said to come from a place of feminine inquiry and wonder.

Concluded director Ikuhara, "I think my generation, as well as the younger generation, lacks imagination." The success of *REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA*, with its evocative music and departures in style, its vivid action and mysterious storyline, belies his claim. Not only does director Ikuhara himself have the ingenuity and creative genius to bring us the surreal meld of images and music which is UTENA, but apparently — in both Japan and the U.S. — his audience has the imagination and to appreciate it.

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boyfriend. Jury is in love with another girl. Utena and Jury both talk like boys in the original Japanese, while Miki is voiced by a high feminine voice and sometimes speaks like a girl. And, of course, the lead men all have long hair and somewhat feminine features.

ON DEATH AND DYING

Sex is not the only issue Americans find unsuitable for children that is treated frankly in UTENA. Images of coffins and death appear regularly throughout the series. The series starts with the image of the graves of Utena's parents, and the opening shot of Ohtori Academy shows it to have the key-like shape of a kofun, an ancient Japanese burial mound. Other symbols of death include the student councils' white uniforms (white being the color of death in Japan as black is here), the opening shots of the graves of Utena's parents, and various images of Utena and Anthy in coffins that appear throughout the series. The subsequent Black Rose saga includes one morbid image after another, including the deliberate burning to death of 100 boys. There are even hints that the real Anthy has been in a coffin all along, and only meets Utena for the first time at the end, when their hands touch for a moment before swords pierce Utena.

As Rachael Lillis puts it, "...death is a prevalent theme in the series. The series opens by telling about the death of Utena's parents. She wanted to die along with them. Then she encountered her prince and was revived from her depression. By series' end, she still has the will to die, but selflessly."

Dark motifs run through the entire series. Crispin Freeman recalled the scene where Saionji kidnaps Anthy and takes her forcibly to the Arena Forest. "It's my favorite shot in the whole series. I damn near jumped out of the chair. Utena comes up to the door and finds Saionji face down in the pool. Talk about Jung and [Joseph] Campbell! Here's the man who has met the first task [of the hero — from Joseph Campbell's analysis of the hero's tasks], but he is

not able to swim in those waters. The hero comes upon the demon and beats it or is swallowed and reborn. Saionji can not beat it. He is literally, in the animation, drowning in the waters of his own subconscious."

OH, THOSE WONDERFUL VOICES

The Japanese voice cast for UTENA includes Takehito Koyashu as Touga Kiryuu, Takeshi Kusao as Kyouichi Saionji, Tomoko Kawakami as Utena Tenjou, and Yuriko Fuchizaki — whom one reviewer claimed had the most beautiful voice he

few of Chu Chu's scenes, and I sort of stammered and said, 'Uh, what did you have in mind for him?' Jim said, 'You know...that scary thing you do. Try that.' And I did. I guess he liked it because when we'd finished dubbing Chu Chu's scenes, Jim said, 'Yep, you're the alien monkey.'...Chu Chu is the lightness amidst all the drama. Chu Chu's face doesn't change a whole lot, so I assume that he's pretty happy wherever he is, as long as he's got food. He's a kick.

"One funny thing I remember from the dubbing," Lillis continued, "in Volume

Two, Nanami picks this little boy for a boyfriend and abuses him. Utena and Miki are watching and wondering at this, how she could treat him so badly. Saionji appears and says, 'No matter how you may be abused, you'll do anything to be near the one you love.' He's dressed in his kendo outfit in this scene, and we all fleetingly commented that he looked like he was wearing a skirt. Saionji says, 'Anthy and I share a hidden love.' There is a huge pause after that, and after these long moments, Utena says, 'No one asked you.' The director said, 'Okay, let's look at this line. Heh. Maybe she should say, 'Nice skirt, Saionji.'"

And we recorded it as a joke. We recorded the original line just in case quality control didn't appreciate it, but they kept it. I can't believe they kept it." This is particularly amusing as kendo uniforms, despite their skirt-like appearance, are divided in the middle, making them pants.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING DUBBED

A good dub has to be measured by whether or not the viewer notices that it's dubbed, not by how well it imitates the quality of the original actors. So, complaints by devoted long-time fans aside, the UTENA dub is superb. The only place it falls short is when the actors are called upon to yell "For the Revolution of the World," which often sounds a bit forced. Rachael Lillis gives the character of Utena a delightful touch of sarcasm, and even the most fanatical UTENA fans are praising Crispin Freeman's smooth and sexy performance as Touga.

"The quality of dubs is increasing," Lillis added. "People are taking it a lot more



CUTTING CHORDS: Miki Kaoru, talented pianist and secretary to the student council, believes that Anthy possesses the musical prowess to help him heal wounds borne since his disastrous concert debut.

had ever heard — as Anthy Himemiya. The English cast, in the same order, is Crispin Freeman, Jack Taylor, Rachael Lillis, and Sharon Becker as Anthy, whose voice is also very sweet.

Crispin Freeman spoke about the process of finding the best voice for reading Touga Kiryuu. "They kept telling me, 'Pitch him up, he's supposed to be high school.' And I kept thinking, 'No, you don't understand. He's not meant to be a high school student in that sense.' In the Japanese version, the guy who does the voice of Touga has this low, low basso voice. I mean I can do a good bass, but this guy's voice is really deep. And this same guy [Takehito Koyashu] does all the bishonen. These pretty boys, and they all have this deep, deep voice."

Actress Rachael Lillis reports that while Utena was a bit of a challenge, the voice for Chu Chu came naturally. "Jim Malone (director of the English dub) said, 'I'd like you to do the voice of Chu Chu,' and I hadn't seen the character yet. They showed me a

ADVANCED CLASS: The sexual intimations of UTENA's initial saga (right and below) become more explicit in the series' later episodes, posing serious marketing difficulties for distributor Central Park Media.



seriously. Because the stories are so interesting you think, *Okay, I got to prepare*, and you put yourself into it. UTENA is not like POKEMON at all. It was actually rather intimidating at first. We had to make sure it was not overly comedic or overly dramatic.

Jim Malone of Taj Productions was the director for the dubbed version of UTENA. He explained, "[REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA] is so mysterious and cryptic. I liked it more as it went along. There are a few things you just have to get accustomed to. One thing I did love was the music and effects track. When compared to some of the other things we've done, like SLAYERS, UTENA was a little easier, both because of the repetitive animation interludes, and because there are many

was transpiring. I don't even think the translator knew what was coming in the series. I don't know how many episodes he translated before we started taping. We didn't have the luxury of knowing what was beyond in the remaining episodes. We had to do whatever we could and try to pay attention to as much as possible."

While the cast and crew did all they could, voice actor Crispin Freeman felt that they suffered from not knowing what was to come. He explained, "I do Dios completely wrong. I do him with a deep voice. I should have made him a tenor so that the prince would sound clear and innocent, in juxtaposition to the character of Akio."

Another problem caused by not knowing the rest of the plot was that certain translation or dubbing decisions were made

scenes where the characters faces are turned away from the screen. Under such circumstances, the dubbing goes a little smoother — when we don't have to match syllables to lip flap, we can be a little more faithful to the original.

"Here at Taj, we use strict translation, which we then adapt to lip flap. It was quite difficult to make sure that we were on top of what

without being aware of why the Japanese version was done differently. For example, in the Japanese version, the opening story of the prince and princess is spoken in the voice of a little girl, making it much clearer that Utena does not remember exactly what happened. This same little girl's voice is then used at times throughout the series, including during the very last duel in episode 38, where Utena hears her own little girl's voice speaking. Since the English dub did not provide a little girl's voice for the opening, it will be harder to convey certain subtleties expressed in the original.

Rachael Lillis, the voice of Utena, explained, "The writers do most of the dialog, and it's pretty true to the script. But it's hard to make that cultural jump. Anime tend to have tons of puns, and the writers have to find a way to make those come across. Depending on the writer, the dialog may or may not be really faithful to the original, because adjustments have to be made so that it sounds more fluid.

"In one instance in UTENA, she's standing at the piano, and Miki says something like 'Well, Anthy's playing is so beautiful, it is in her playing.' And Utena, looking down at the piano said 'What do you mean, like all these chips and dents?' Which just doesn't make sense. So the director said, 'Hey, Rachael. Say this instead,' and I wound up trying something more to play off Miki's line: 'What do you mean by it?' So sometimes you can't go by literal translation."

Crispin Freeman reported similar trou-

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REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA

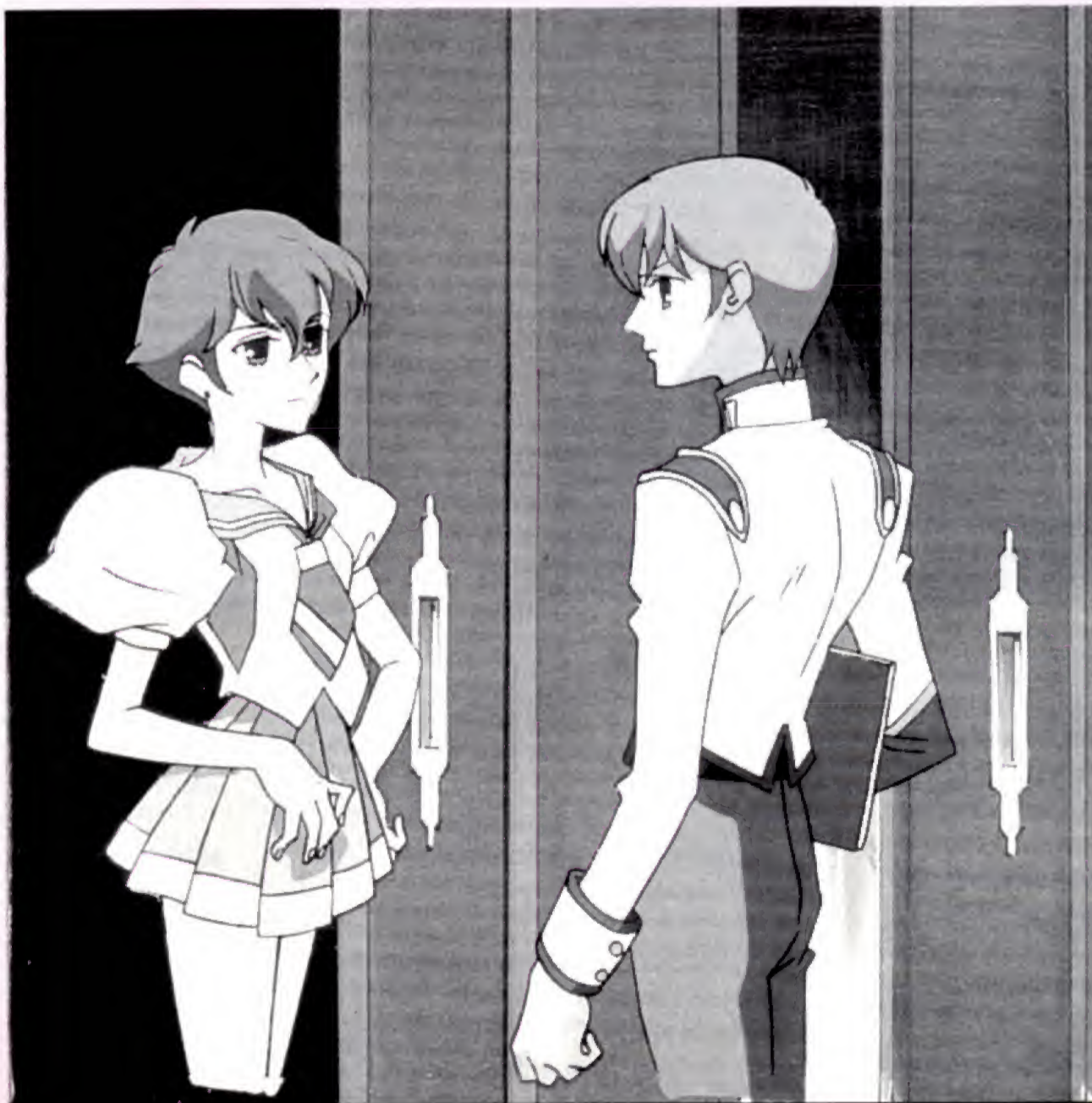
Beyond the Student Council

WARNING! Plot spoilers ahead!

Like many televised anime, **REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA** is a serialized narrative, broken up into distinct "sagas." There are four sagas in all: the Student Council Saga (13 episodes), the Black Rose and Akio Ohtori Sagas (ten each), and the Apocalypse Saga (six episodes) — a total of 39 episodes in all. Only the Student Council saga has been commercially released in the U.S. The further episodes add additional pieces to the UTENA puzzle, allowing more layers of mystery to come to light.

The Black Rose Saga

Brilliant student Mikage dwells in Nemuro Memorial Hall where, some years ago, 100 boys burned to death. He wishes to revolutionize the world and grasp Eternity for himself. To accomplish this, he must make his companion Mamiya, a young boy with the same coloring, cast mark, and red uniform as Anthy and her brother, Akio, into the



A COLLECTION OF PAWNS: Each a prisoner of his or her own personal flaw, the members of the student council — such as Miki Kaoru, shown here with his twin sister — are easily manipulated by those seeking power over the Rose Bride.

Rose Bride. However, this means that he must gain control of Anthy...and kill her.

Mikage and Mamiya begin manipulating people on campus to try to produce a duelist who can defeat Utena. By hypnotizing those who have strong yet bitter feelings towards the student council members, they hope to create duelists who fight with the skill of the student council members, but lack their psychological flaws. Mikage hypnotizes Miki's sister, gives her a black rose-crest ring which once belonged to one of the dead boys (he explains that the pink rose crest rings turn black when their owner dies), and sends her to Miki.

Armed with the mysterious power of the black rose, Miki's sister reaches into his chest and pulls out his "soul sword," much as Utena draws the Sword of Dios from Anthy. When we next see Miki's sister, she is dueling Utena and fighting with Miki's style. One after another, Utena must duel Miki's sister,

Jury's beloved Shiori, Nanami's junior-high boyfriend Tsuwabuki, her own best friend Wakaba — fighting with Saionji's style — and Nanami's bully girl Keiko, fighting in Touga's style. Even these duelists, however, fail to beat Utena, and in the end Mikage is forced to fight Utena himself.

The Black Rose Saga emphasizes the relationship between youth and memories and how dwelling on memories can make a person strong or weak. The memories that haunt the black rose duelists make them weak. The strength and purity of Utena's memories, however, protect her from Mikage's machinations when he attempts to manipulate them. In one scene, Mamiya's sister comes to visit the grave of the brother whom she believes dead. She comments to Akio that he and Mikage look exactly the same age they did when she was young, back before Nemuro Hall burned down. Eerily, Akio responds, "As long as a person stays in this garden we call the Academy, they will never become an adult."

As the saga progresses, we learn that it is Mikage's own memory that is playing tricks on him. When he meets Utena, he sees only Mamiya's sister, Tokiko, whom he loved. We learn that it was Mikage himself who burned down the building, that the boys who died had been research assistants to Akio working on the project of trying to revolutionize the world, and that the act of burning down the building opened the way for the materialization of the upside-down palace that hovers over the arena. When Mikage loses to Utena, Akio tells him, "The boy called Mamiya that you were keeping with you from your lingering attachment to Tokiko died a long time ago. I exploited the illusion you cherished in your memory so much that you even halted your own time... However, that's all over... You graduate now."

Mikage fades so thoroughly that it is as if he never existed. Nemuro Memorial Hall is once again a burnt-out ruin, and no one can even remember its name. In the last shot, as Akio stands with the version of the ghost boy Mamiya that looks

like him, the camera pans back and we discover...well, let's just say that Utena was not the only person whose true identity Mikage could not see.

The Akio Ohtori Saga

In the first of the Black Rose episodes, Utena meets Anthy's brother Akio, the trustee chairman for the Academy. However, it is not until this point that he begins playing a larger part in the plot. Akio is engaged to marry the daughter of Mr. Ohtori, the chairman of the Ohtori Academy. As the Ohtori family has only one daughter, Akio has agreed to adopt her last

name. This tradition of a man adopting the last name of his wife is common in Japan, and appears in numerous anime (Gendou Ikari in NEON GENESIS EVANGELION comes to mind). Such a man is called a *yoshey* and is usually of a lower social class than his bride. *Ohtori* is the Japanese word for phoenix, but it is often used in stories as the last name of a powerful and opulent family. Thus Akio, by joining with this family, acquires their power and opulence.

In the Akio Ohtori Saga, we learn that Akio is End of the World, the force behind the duels. He and his marvelous car, a red convertible that can appear nearly anywhere (on the dueling arena, out of a fountain, crashing through a window), seduce the members of the student council (figuratively and literally) into fighting Utena again. They all try and lose. Eventually, Akio himself seduces Utena, who sleeps with him even though she fears that by doing so, she is betraying her prince.

The Apocalypse Saga

Apparently, there is more to the story of the prince and little Utena than Utena remembers. Dios, the prince, took her to see Anthy, a young woman transfixated by hundreds of blades. He told her that once there was a

DIOS THE KEY: A mysterious prince once inspired young Utena, fueling the acts that comprise the sagas of REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA. But is all that occurred in the past really as Utena remembers it?

prince who tried to save all the little girls in the world, but fell ill in the process. When the people came calling for his help, his sister, Anthy, refused to let them trouble him. Angered, the mob killed her. On that day, Dios' good nature died, and he became Akio. Little Utena, upon hearing the story, wanted to save Anthy. The Prince tells her that only a brave and noble prince could save this princess. So, Utena vowed to become just that.

The last duel, named Revolution, is against Akio. Touga, who wishes to save Utena from having to fight Akio, confesses his love for her and challenges her one more time, hoping to win and be the one to face Akio. Touga fails, and the last duel begins.

Akio tries to convince Utena that she can be a normal woman now, a princess to his prince. She refuses, fights him, nearly wins, but is betrayed by Anthy. The thousand blades piercing the "real" Anthy appear. In a moment of great bravery, Utena sacrifices herself and takes the blow instead.

In the last scene, people at Ohtori Academy are beginning to forget Utena, though not as completely as Mikage was forgotten at the end of the Black Rose Saga. Akio regrets that Utena has failed, but is already beginning his plans to begin the Rose Crest Cycle again. Anthy dissents, though, saying that Utena did not fail, but merely escaped from Akio's world, the

coffin in which he lives. Anthy takes off her glasses, and Chu Chu takes off the earring and tie (which he wore to resemble Akio,) and the two of them go off in search of Utena, whom they believe is out there somewhere.

Did Utena fail? Aya Fujimiya tackles this question in Team Bonet's Touga Shrine (www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Towers/306/utena.html) "Utena's defeat at the hands of Akio's illusions could be considered losing, a wasted effort, only if her presence at the Academy had not brought about any change. And it did. Before Utena came to the Academy, Jury was a bitter young woman, regretting the love she could not have...Miki and his twin sister were divided, unable to grow beyond their childhood disappointments... Nanami was a cruel, spiteful girl, obsessed with her handsome brother...Touga and Saionji were cold rivals, locked in a struggle to prove their worth, unable to rebuild their bond of childhood friendship..."

"Utena shattered all of that. The closing images of the series' final episode (no. 39) are both hopeful and saddening. The Council members go on with their lives, Utena forgotten, but the viewer is aware that their lives are no longer the same, and will never be the same...Utena has won. She has carried out a splendid revolution, freed the hearts of people enslaved by their own hopes and fears."

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L. Jagi Lamplighter





OUTSIDE THE ARENA: When she isn't navigating the treacherous currents of student politics, Utena has to contend with the typical student dorm (left) and the omnivorous appetites of monkey/chipmunk/whatsit Chu Chu (below).



bles, only with an amusing twist. He explained, "When Touga sees Utena win the first duel, he says, 'Oh, yes, baby. You've lit the fire in me!' I read that and I said, 'You have got to be kidding. This has got to be a lame translation!' I saw it come up and thought, 'How do I say thing without sounding like a complete idiot?' We got it on the first take, but we nearly pissed in our pants. The funny thing was, when I finally heard the Japanese, I found out that's exactly what Touga said: 'Oh, yes, baby!' Literally, in English! I couldn't believe it!"

ORIGINS

REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA was directed by Kunihiro Ikuhara, director of the international hit *SAILOR MOON*. Other of his works include *MAPLE TOWN MONOGARARI*, *FIGHTER GENERAL II*, *RAMEN-MAN*, *DEVIL-KUN* and *MORETSU ATAROU*, and the popular *GOLD-FISH WARNING*. He is a good friend of Hideaki Anno, the moody director of *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*. The two occasionally appear in interviews together. Currently, he is entering a collaboration with Mamoru Nagano of *THE FIVE STAR STORIES* fame.

In 1997, Kunihiro Ikuhara won the prestigious Kobe award for his direction of *REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA*. *UTENA* also captured Best TV Animation. Recently, *UTENA* also did very well in an *Animage* magazine reader poll, including receiving honors for Best Opening Theme.

The story for *UTENA* was created by Be-Papas, the anime company Kunihiro Ikuhara helped to found after his success with *SAILOR MOON*. A manga version has been made available by Chiho Saito, currently one of Japan's most popular shojo

artists. Chiho Saito normally writes manga whose story-lines and themes would be most familiar to readers of historical romances, with titles such as *Lady and the Sword*, *Marionette*, *White Waltz*, and *Madonna of the Flowers*. In these stories, the characters fall in love, are torn apart, have their children kidnapped, and die for love, and women regularly dress as men. She also wrote *Magnolia Waltz*, the romance Waka-ba is raving about in Episode Two of *UTENA*.

The *UTENA* manga includes additional touches not included in the series, such as, in the opening scenario, the prince actually rescuing the little girl, who has fallen into a river — rather than merely cheering her up. Also, when the spirit of Dios manifests to help Utena fight Saionji, it is obvious that the others watching clearly see him descend. In the anime, this is not as obvious.

ROUGH SAILING AT CPM

The folks at Central Park Media dropped the ball on a few *UTENA*-related details, releasing it without quite the care devoted fans would have liked. One of the episodes is titled 'Next Episode' instead of by its title. The preview scenes for Episode 12 at the end of Episode 11 call it, "Gracefully Cool, the One Who Picks The Rose," while the actual episode title is, "Gracefully Cruel, the One Who Picks The Rose." Also, CPM titled the second box in their four box set, "The Legendary Spice," but did not include the "Legendary Spice" episode (a Nanami episode) until box three. Still, mistakes aside, the English version is a splendid dub, and for that CPM deserves much credit.

CPM's decision to initially buy only 13 of the 39 episodes, though perhaps done for practical reasons, has also created some problems. The staff at CPM seemed unaware that the later episodes contain explicit sex, homosexuality, and incest. As of last time we checked, plans had not been cemented for how to deal with this from a marketing standpoint. CPM staff member Christopher Sippel seemed cheerfully amused at the concept of having to label part of a series, "Mature audiences only." While he offered no definite answers, Mr. Sippel conveyed the impression that CPM would soon find a solution to this problem and would not allow it to interfere with their efforts to bring more *UTENA* to America.

UTENA: THE MOVIE

The *REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA* movie, *ADOLESCENCE MOKUSHIROKU (APOCALYPSE)*, is due to appear in theaters in Japan this summer. The movie is being billed as an alternate version of the story rather than a continuation of the television plot line, rather like the relationship between the *MACROSS* series and the *MACROSS* movie: *DO YOU REMEMBER LOVE?* (a.k.a. *CLASH OF THE BIONOIDS*). A recent article in Japan's *Newtype* magazine explained, "The characters' parts, while retreading the television series' version, are also different from it, and it seems that a different ending is being prepared."

The *UTENA* movie takes place a few years after the events of the series, when

Touga and Utena meet again after some time apart. The publicity for the movie claims that it will center around the love story of Touga and Utena...however, there is also a male Utena — perhaps a result of the events at the end of the television series. According to the pre-release publicity, the movie also promises to reveal the mystery of “why Utena wears boys clothing.”

In an interview in the March 1999 issue of *Newtype* magazine, series director Kuni-hiko Ikuhara said, on the subject of his upcoming film, “We intend to precisely show the relationship between Utena and Touga that went unshown in the television series.” He has also been quoted saying, “This will be a film no children can see,” and “I want to show the kind of sins that people struggle to carry.”

Recently, *Bessatsu Shoujo Comic* released a 100-page special manga adaptation of *ADOLESCENCE MOKUSHI-ROKU*, also by manga artist Chiho Saito. The manga is said to have incorporated the new character designs planned for the movie. Utena’s bangs have been redesigned, which has some fans worried. However, the most dramatic change seems to be Anthy. Instead of the familiar, incredibly sweet, dark-skinned beauty, the new Anthy seems to be a overly cute girl with light tan skin — a creature resembling *Pretty Sammy* more than the Anthy from the TV series. Only time will show us whether these changes will be embraced or rejected by *UTENA*’s fans.

CROSSING THE VOID

While *REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA* is archetypal shojo, the series is hardly just for girls. The depth of character, sophistication of design, mood-evoking musical interludes, and the excitement of the constant swordfights (more swordfighting than many shonen cartoons) appeal to both male and female viewers. While the show does grow more moody and surreal as time goes on, the first 13 episodes are eminently enjoyable and definitely recommended.

Carmen Spray, webmaster of the End of Innocence web page, best summed up *UTENA*: “I think if I were to emphasize anything about *UTENA*, it would be that there is no one perfect or wholly fitting interpretation of the story. It really is the kind of work where you can find exactly what you need in it—whether a deep psychological warning resonating to the works of Hesse and the old German philosophers, or just a bunch of really beautiful people in ornate clothes acting out a romantic drama... I think the mystery and, for me, appeal of the story is that you DO have to find your own answers—nothing is handed to you on a silver platter.” She wryly concluded, “That being said, I have my own interpretation, of course.”

AFA



COUPLES THERAPY: Utena’s dedication to drawing Anthy out of her passive role as the Rose Bride (left) is constantly tested by the cruel manipulations of student council president Touga (above).



Anime got its **GUNDAM**

How to build a classic, science fiction series:
Make sure it's about more than giant robots.

by MICHAEL
O'CONNELL

Spanning 20 years of television series, films, and original animated videos, **MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM** has come to occupy a place in the Japanese consciousness similar to that **STAR TREK** holds for most Americans. Many of the characters are pop-culture icons, and the armored battle suits that are so much a part of the **GUNDAM** mystique have spawned a veritable empire of toy and model replicas. In Japan, the series has boldly ventured where no giant robot has gone before.

America got its first, formal look at **GUNDAM** last Fall when AnimeVillage began selling the three original **MS GUNDAM** films — as well as the 0080: **WAR IN THE POCKET** and 0083: **STARDUST MEMORY** video series — through its website.

"**GUNDAM** is surely our 'A' title," admitted Ken Iyadomi, the executive vice president and original animation producer at AnimeVillage, the American



anime distribution arm of Japanese entertainment giant Bandai. Last Spring, as his company prepared to release dubbed and subtitled **GUNDAM** tapes on the retail market, Iyadomi elaborated on the significance of the series.

"**GUNDAM** really changed the world of animation," he said. "In Japan, animation was considered 'kids stuff,' even though there were hits like **SPACE CRUISER YAMATO** (**STAR BLAZERS** in the U.S.), which were aimed at teenagers. But **GUNDAM** really caught the attention of the entire population with its more sophisticated story-telling."

And what a story it was. Set hundreds of years in the future, the first **MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM** television series detailed the conflict between the Earth Federation and the Duchy of Zeon. Humanity had left its home world and settled on huge, cylindrical-shaped satellite colonies known as Sides, with the Zeon faction, led by the dictatorial Zabi family, occupying Side 3. Resentful of the Federation's influence, Zeon

launched a surprise attack on Earth. Following months of devastating combat, the two forces reached an uneasy stalemate, the Zeons holding a technological edge. Their scientists were the first to develop heavily armored mobile suits which allowed a single soldier to strike successfully against enemy spaceships. Two or three Zeon Zakus could wipe out an entire fleet of Earth battleships.

At the beginning of the TV series, the Federation had just developed its own mechanized offensive system, the **Gundam**



mobile suits. Young Amuro Ray, an inexperienced computer expert, hopped into the cockpit of the mobile suit his father helped design and went on to become the Federation's greatest hero. Later events revealed that Amuro was actually the first New Type, a super-evolved human with undefined psychic powers.

Despite its 20 years of success, people tend to forget that when **GUNDAM** premiered on Japanese television in 1979, it flopped. Although slated to run for 52 weeks, the series garnered such low ratings that the network planned to ax it after only 39 installments. This early cancellation would have left many story threads unresolved. Fortunately, the network granted **GUNDAM**'s creators an additional four episodes to tie everything together. With the screening of episode 43 on January 26, 1980, the **GUNDAM** saga came to an abrupt end. It was finished, kaput, DOA — except for re-runs, of course.

Just as **STAR TREK** rose from the ashes of cancellation through syndicated re-runs in the United States, **GUNDAM** grew more and more popular with each re-screening. Feeding the frenzy was a popular line of plastic model kits which recreated the spaceships and humanoid mobile suits that populated the futuristic **GUNDAM** uni-

verse.

"It was a merchandising success more than an actual animation success," explained American anime translator Neil Nadelman. "It was the model kits that sold



it. Eventually, it grew into this enormous science fiction franchise."

Considering the prominence that **GUNDAM** achieved in Japanese popular culture, coupled with the American anime boom, it seems odd that no one thought any sooner to release **GUNDAM** here. "Basically, the Bandai Group had an overall plan for **GUNDAM**," Iyadomi admitted. "So many people within the company had different opinions. They wanted to do

MECHA VISION: Fired by a model kit marketing blitz, fans came for **GUNDAM**'s giant robots, but stayed for the engaging storyline.

big, grand things in the United States. The opinion that we brought up was that we should produce it, but [we needed] to build the popularity on the ground level, because **GUNDAM** is not known by many people in the U.S."

In the end, Bandai and the producers at AnimeVillage agreed to start at the beginning...sort of. "The fans basically wanted to start with the original **GUNDAM**," Iyadomi said. "Instead of bringing out the original TV series, we brought out the three movies which covered all of the first **GUNDAM** series."

The lion's share of translating fell to Nadelman, who supplied scripts for the first and second movies as well as every episode of both OVA series. "I was really excited, especially since it was 'old' **GUNDAM** and not any of these new, parallel Earth shows that they've been doing lately," he said. "I've been a **GUNDAM** fan for years. In fact, I had actually done some fan translations of **GUNDAM** years ago."

One of the advantages of being involved at the beginning of such a big and important anime project was that Nadelman could help establish the definitive "American ver-

sion" of the GUNDAM universe. "I've been watching the fan community try to bring together all of the inconsistencies and terminology of GUNDAM," Nadelman explained. "So I approached the whole project as a big chance to finally get the terminology right — not make it up, just try to use name spellings that are ba-



the effects of the interplanetary war on residents of a neutral colony. After a damaged Zaku crashes near his home, 11-year-old Al Izuruha befriends the downed pilot. Later, when the pilot returns to the colony to spy on Federation forces, Al inadvertently gets involved in a very deadly game of war and politics. In *STARDUST MEMORY*, Zeon rebels capture a



LIKE FAMILY: Across the many sagas of GUNDAM, viewers have had the opportunity to become emotionally invested in the fates of its characters, such as Char (above), New Type Amuro (left), and young Al Izuruha (below).



sically accepted by most of the fan community."

Although Nadelman would still like to translate the original television series one day, he agrees with Bandai's decision to release the films first. "Whatever my feelings for the movies are, the movies are the accepted story continuity at this point. The movies are, in fact, more 'legitimate' than the television series, as I understand it."

That being said, the three films have a lot to offer new viewers. "The stories are still very solid and they're very good movies," said Nadelman. "There is a class of fans that are only interested in the slick, neatest looking thing of the week. GUNDAM didn't become famous just because it's pretty. There was a really good story with really good characters in there. It will probably be like *ARMORED TROOPER VOTOMS*, where you have one group of fans who say that it's ugly and that they're not interested, while others will be totally enraptured with it. They're really into the story."

Though Nadelman likes the movies, he's the first to admit that they offer certain challenges for the translator. "I've always felt that that the biggest problem with the GUNDAM movies is that it's taking a story that's supposed to develop over the course of watching a one-half hour episode a week into these marathon sessions."

"It's not so much that the movies are difficult, dialogue-wise," Nadelman explained. "It's more along the lines that the movies cram a lot of story in there. The dialogue's mostly straightforward. A couple of times they wax lyrical a little too much and you sort of forget what they're talking about after a while."

"The only problem with old GUNDAM



is when they try to get fancy with the dialogue, as when Amuro is having his big speech with Lalah. I'm still not sure what they're talking about. You talk it over with the translation checker, the Japanese end of things. You do the translation and you make your best guess at what they're saying. If he thinks that you've got it, he'll leave it alone. If he doesn't think you've got it, he'll make his suggestion and you'll talk it over. What's most important is that you have a script that makes sense at the end of it. For the most part, I think the GUNDAM scripts turned out really well."

If nothing else, AnimeVillage's three films provide American animation fans with a quick introduction to the often complex GUNDAM universe. ("Quick" is a relative term, since each video runs approximately two-and-a-half hours.) On the other hand, the 0080: *WAR IN THE POCKET* and 0083: *STARDUST MEMORY* OVAs showcase some of the more popular aspects of the long-running program.

Each OVA series is self-contained and delivers a different perspective on the Zeon/Earth Federation conflict. Set in the same time frame as the original television series, *WAR IN THE POCKET* focuses on

new prototype Gundam from an Earth base several years after the end of the Zeon/Earth war. This act triggers a new conflict in which Earth forces scramble to recover the prototype before the Zeons unleash their new, deadly weapon.

"I like the OVAs for completely different reasons," Nadelman said. "0080 is different from pretty much every other GUNDAM story. It takes on the civilian and Zeon points of view. The most interesting point is that the guy who wrote the screenplay for 0080 put a lot of references to Sam Peckinpah's *THE WILD BUNCH* into it. What's interesting is that *THE WILD BUNCH* is very similar in tone, because it was a Western told from the point of view of the bad guys. It was about the closing of the West and the end of the careers of the Wild Bunch. With this one, it's the end of the One Year War and the inevitable defeat of the Zeon. It's about this group of Zeon soldiers who are basically trying to do what they feel is the right thing."

0080: *WAR IN THE POCKET* is also unique in that it addresses a basic irony at the core of the GUNDAM saga. "GUNDAM is trapped," the translator said. "It's an anti-war show but it glorifies war. It leads a weird, double existence. 0080 was the first one to focus on: 'After the robots stomp off into the sunset, they leave a lot of dead bodies that they've stomped on.'"

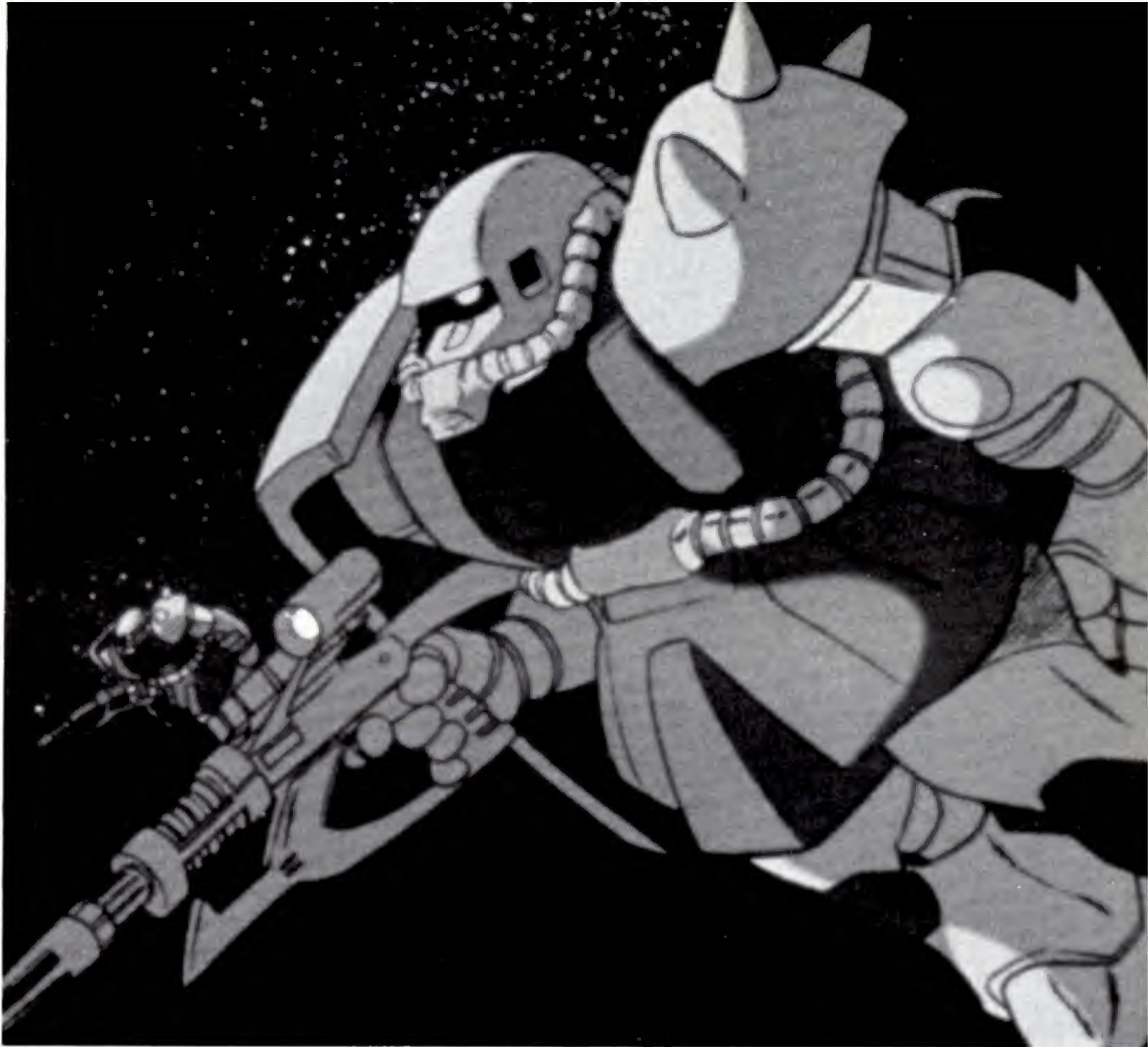
If *WAR IN THE POCKET* deals with the innocent victims of war, then 0083 *STARDUST MEMORIES* explores the psyche of the grunt. "It's the best *VOTOMS* story ever done as a GUNDAM," joked Nadelman. "Basically, it deals with giant conspiracies at the very top of the military and the guy at the bottom of the chain who is completely oblivious to what his com-

manders are doing. The commanders never trust their own people, which leaves a bunch of people at the bottom trying to do what they think is right and ending up not knowing what they're fighting for."

For many fans, *STARDUST MEMORY* contains some of the most memorable action sequences and dynamic mobile suit designs of any GUNDAM program. This ability of GUNDAM to constantly reinvent itself is one of the things that have kept it so popular for two decades. "One of the things that I always like about the OVAs is that when they go back to the One Year War, they try desperately to make everything look the same, but cooler," said Nadelman. "It's like we're seeing history through a better looking glass this time."

A criticism of *STARDUST MEMORY*, in particular, is that it's really just a dressed-up rehash of the original television series. "But at the same time, a rehash with a lot of energy and style to make it sufficiently enjoyable," said Nadelman. He sees a lot of the same sort of thing in Hong Kong cinema. "They can be the most derivative things in the world. A lot of times, they rip-off Hollywood movies, so they're being derivative of stuff that's already derivative. But at the same time, they usually do it with an energy and style that make it enjoyable to watch. I don't care if 0083 is rehashing old elements and I don't care if it [downplays] the uniqueness of the New Types by basically ignoring their existence. Just as introducing New Types was sort of a unique thing for GUNDAM, doing a GUNDAM not about New Types is unique for GUNDAM."

Perhaps GUNDAM's greatest strength is its ability to address both simple and complex human emotions against a vast background. "There are certain scenes in



GUNDAM where the dialogue really sends me. That's the reason why I like it," Nadelman admitted. "Things like at the end of the first movie where Gihren Zabi is making his big speech to Earth system, basically laying it on the line why he feels that they should do this. It's your classic, dictator-whipping-up-the-masses speech. It's a great speech. There's Dozul Zabi, the guy in the third movie on the Big Zam, knowing that he was doomed and crawling out on the top with a machine gun in his final act of defiance. There's Amuro seeing all of his hate materialize around him because he has that power at this point, but he's not able to understand what he's looking at. Amuro is a character who spends a lot of GUNDAM asking 'What am I feeling? What am I seeing? What am I hearing?' His powers keep jumping and he has no idea what's going on. And of course, there's Char, who was supposedly fighting for New Types and yet realizing that acting the way he does, he'll never be a true New Type. He's still trapped

in the old way of thinking."

Now that GUNDAM has finally reached our shores, the question remains: will it make as big a splash here as it did in Japan? For Nadelman, the answer is sadly obvious. "I think it's impossible," he said. "For one, it looks old. [With the way it looks,] you've lost the fans who are just into what's shiny and new. For another thing, in order for it to be a gigantic success, it would have to have a gigantic marketing push behind it, which I don't see it having. It's a shame, but that's up to the licensor — up to Bandai — how they want to sell this. I think if they look at GUNDAM and think that it's going to be a multi-million dollar seller, I'm sorry. Most anime in America doesn't reach that, especially old anime. GUNDAM has a great fan following, but once you get past the fan base, you're one more tape on the shelves."

Just as it was in Japan, GUNDAM may well be a slow starter in the U.S. At first, Bandai made the questionable decision to only offer GUNDAM for sale on the AnimeVillage website. Eventually, the company bowed to the pressures of the marketplace and started releasing the videos in stores. Likewise, AnimeVillage opted to produce English-dubbed versions of the movies and OVAs. "Cost-wise, it was ten times more than subtitling," admitted Iyadomi. With these concessions, along with the upcoming release of the GUNDAM model kits, Bandai may have started the first steps in the gradual Gundamization of America.

AFQ



EPIC AMBITION: The tech (not to mention the animation style) may have changed over the years (upper right), yet emotional complexity has always remained a GUNDAM hallmark.



ANGRY

BEAVERS

The Nickelodeon series makes a play for teens and adults with surreal humor and B-movie cross-references.

by MITCH
PERSONS

Angry beavers? *Angry?* Flustered maybe, and testy, and at times downright cowardly. But are the beaver brothers Norbert and Daggett the angry rodents suggested by the title of their Nickelodeon show, now enjoying its third season? Not really. As a matter of fact, they're kind of cute.

"When I pitched the show to Nickelodeon," said ANGRY BEAVERS creator Mitch Schauer, "the whole premise was about two bad-tempered, politically incorrect beavers. They hated, literally *hated*, anything that was a fad or a cause. They were going to go after anything that was being parlayed in magazines and in the media, they were going to rip it to shreds. The network convinced me — rightly as it turned out — that the airwaves were filled with angry animated critters, and it might be better to soften the attitude.

"Also, at the beginning, Norb and Dag were not brothers, they were buddies. When the show got into full swing, Mary Harrington, the executive producer for Nickelodeon, suggested we make these guys siblings. That was another idea that worked, because it really created the chemistry that was initially lacking. If you have leads that are just friends, friends can walk away from each other when they need to, regroup. If they have an argument, they can separate. But when two guys are brothers, regardless of whether they have an argument or not, they're tied to one another."

An Emmy-award nominee for the animated series *BOBBY'S WORLD*, Schauer has been an animation buff since the age of eight, when, he said, "My Uncle Steve taught me how to do flip books. That got me hooked on the whole idea of animation. I was so hooked, I used to plunk myself down at my TV and watch Hanna-Barbera's *JONNY QUEST* and *SPACE GHOST* without moving a muscle." As an artist, the Oklahoma-born Schauer worked on such shows as *PAC MAN* and *QUACKULA*. He has been an associate producer, then producer for Hanna-Barbera, churning out *THE 13 GHOSTS OF SCOOPY DOO*, *STAR FAIRIES*, and *POUND PUPPIES*. For Warner Bros. Animation he produced 13 half-hours of *STEVEN SPIELBERG'S FREAKAZOID!* Schauer is now the VP of Creative Development for Gunther-Wahl Productions, the company that helms ANGRY BEAVERS.

"Aside from *BOBBY'S WORLD*," continued Schauer, "in which the design of Bobby was based on my son Robert, BEAVERS is the most subjective show I've ever done. People outside Oklahoma may not catch this, but I try to reference my home town, a little hamlet outside of Tulsa, on signs and buildings in the backgrounds. The character of Norbert is 100% me, while brother Daggett is based on a friend of mine.

"Daggett is the guy who carries his heart on his sleeve. He's very gregarious and outgoing, and just leaps in at any point and does whatever is necessary to get things

accomplished. He's not stupid, but he's gullible and naive. He overreacts, and Norbert just loves to push his brother's buttons to get him to respond the way he does. That's the whole thing with Norbert: his enjoyment in life is getting Dag to react. But Norb has this almost bemused detachment. It's as if he knows every situation they get involved in is only a cartoon, that at any moment the closing credits will appear and he can tell Daggett that everything that happened was all make believe."

Even with the clash of temperaments, there is a very real element of brotherly love between the two protagonists. Close ties like these are things that Nickelodeon always manages to focus on, and since BEAVERS is a kid's show, the attachment between Dag and Norb is something that children can easily relate to. "We're now skewing the show to include an older crowd. Teenagers, or even parents can remember doing the stuff that Norbert and Daggett do, or know adults that act the same way as the beavers. They're supposed to be grown up, but are not acting grown up. In an episode called 'My Bunnyguard,' the guys go through some rampant paranoia when they receive what appears to be a threatening note. The note turns out to have been written by the gigantic bunny they've hired as a bodyguard. It was the only way this lonely guy could get their attention and their friendship. We all know or hear of adults who, like Norb and Dag, have reverted to primal behavior over some imagined — or real — threat.

"Another way we've captured a somewhat older audience is by our more frequent references to the horror genre B-movies of the fifties and sixties. That is an area that is also a personal one. To me there was always something about the earnestness of the scripts in such films as Universal's **TARANTULA** and **THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON**. One of my favorite **BEAVERS** segments was one called, 'The Day The Earth Got Really Screwed Up,' which was an homage to one of the greatest B-films of all time, **THIS ISLAND EARTH** [starring Rex Reason]. In our story, Norb and Dag find themselves in the home of Dag's favorite B-movie actor, Oxnard Montalvo. They get involved in a wild ride involving the Earth being taken over by aliens, and Oxnard has to come to everyone's rescue.

"Oxnard, who is voiced by Tom Kane, is a mixture of several of the greatest of the B-movie leading men. He's Rex Reason, Jeff Morrow, and Richard Carlson all rolled up in one. We took several qualities from all of those guys — the rugged, handsome hero that smoked and drank, the real manly fifties type — and put them into Oxnard. Like Reason, Morrow and Carlson, he's a trifle on the square side, and a bit ludicrous. He doesn't quite grasp what's happening, and that makes him something of a comic figure. However, he is brave, and he manages, in his jut-jawed, sci-fi hero way, to save the world.

"Montalvo carries himself with a lot of dignity. He closely resembles the original conception of Peter Sellers' Inspector Clouseau and Leslie Nielsen's Frank Drebin characters. Oxnard has to play it straight to be as silly as he is. If he was a buffoon, he wouldn't be nearly as funny. After the first film that Drebin appeared in, **NAKED GUN**, Nielsen started making fun of himself, and took all the humor out of the character. The same thing with Clouseau. If you watch the first and second **PINK PANTHER** films, Sellers still maintained his integrity, and then after that he became a totally unfunny goofball.

"As to how Oxnard was animated, we tried to stick to the same fifties and sixties sensibilities. While Norb and Dag were drawn in their usual way, Oxnard and his cronies were more naturalistic — they might have stepped out of an episode of **JONNY QUEST**. We purposely tried to keep the animation on these human characters very limited. The reason for that was that in action-adventure cartoons today, the rule is if it keeps moving, it keeps the kids interested. It keeps them interested, all right, but it looks awful, just awful. It's not easy to draw realistic characters, but we tried to maintain really strong poses and personalities, and we had the animation when we needed it. Oxnard and friends came off as looking a little old-fashioned, which was fine, because when you analyze

Oxnard, he is, at his core, an old-fashioned kind of guy.

"Oxnard has appeared in only a few **BEAVERS** segments, but we are toying around with the idea of making him a semi-regular character. That's kind of a touchy thing, in a way, since he is so unique, and we already have a unique semi-regular in the person of Stump.

"Anybody tuning in to **ANGRY BEAVERS** in mid-season might be puzzled by Stump. Stump is nothing more than the stump of an elm tree. He never talks, nobody ever sees him move, yet off-screen he is able to accomplish all these wondrous feats. He can play Beethoven on the piano, he's one of the world's best gourmet chefs, he's an archaeologist, an architect... Stump had his genesis one day when the staff was sitting down having a conversation about beaver behavior. They were saying things like, 'Beavers chew down trees, don't they? What if we have the guys chew down this tree and they feel sorry for the stump that's left — it has this face on it — and they decide to take care of it. Let's make this character totally motionless on screen. There can be this conflict between Norb and Dag. Most of the time Norb believes that Stump is nothing more than a sedentary hunk of wood, and treats him like one, but Dag is convinced that Stump is a living, breathing, moving creature.'

"One of the first times we see Stump, Dag and Norb are watching a slide show with him, and the three of them see a shot of a couple of oak trees. Norb turns to Stump and says, 'You know, I think it's possible that you've been adopted, because you're an elm, and your parents on the screen here, they're oaks.' Well, this little sap tear runs out of Stump's eye, there is a cut to Norb for his reaction, then this stump is heard clumping across the floor to the front door, getting into a car and driving away. It was a priceless moment, and one that forever established Stump's personality.

"Stump is the only character who never talks in **ANGRY BEAVERS**. Everyone else is fairly loquacious. We are fortunate in having some of the best voiceover actors around. Daggett is played by Richard Horvitz, and the part of Norbert is taken on



RODENT TO REDEMPTION: After paying his dues on **STAR FAIRIES** and **POUND PUPPIES**, Mitch Schauer brings a more personal investment to the edgy, surreal **ANGRY BEAVERS**.

by Nick Bakay, the same man who does Salem the Cat on **SABRINA, THE TEENAGED WITCH**. A few fairly big name stars have lent us their vocal skills. When **BEAVERS** took the B-movie turn, we went after some of the best-known names in the genre, and we got them. We've used Robert Stack, Peter Graves, William Schallert, Adrienne Barbeau.

"You would think that these well-established stars would balk at doing a cartoon. Sometimes they surprise you. There are many instances where we contact a big-time star and she or he may have grandkids, or may have kids, and she or he says, 'God, I'd love to do a cartoon.' Now, obviously television cartoons don't pay a lot of money, so sometimes we have to make special arrangements: we have to figure out a way to work the budget, things like that. Gunther-Wahl is now in the process of developing an animated pompous rock opera called **MAGNUM OPUS**, and we contacted Peter O'Toole to see if he would be interested in doing the narration. We were all excited about possibly getting him, but then we remembered that in order to get such a big name we had to negotiate a deal, and it could very possibly fall through. We try never to get our hopes up so high that we don't know these things could happen."

AFQ

BATTLE ON, BIG LUNK: FIST OF THE NORTH STAR DOES OUT A WORLD OF HURT

TODD
FRENCH

THE HUNDRED-CRACK FIST OF THE NORTH STAR!

Ya-ta-ta-ta-ta-tahhh!

Now released stateside, Toei Animation's post-apocalyptic, martial-arts splatter-thon, **FIST OF THE NORTH STAR**, is available in all its blood-spouting, limb-cracking glory from the folks at Manga Entertainment, Inc. The early '80s anime series, itself spun-off from the original manga comic-strip which debuted in *Shonen Jump* is, if nothing else, a curio for the most die-hard gore-hounds: the chief selling-point of **FIST** is hangin' through the turgid, plodding storyline to find out how Ken is going to off the next baddie.

More about that, later. The plot owes a big debt to Miller's **MAD MAX/ROAD WARRIOR** movies, and — like its more objectionable, black-sheep OVA brother, **VIOLENCE JACK** — to basic Leone spaghetti-oaters: in a future, post-nuked earth, lawless brigandage reigns supreme. Order is maintained (or disrupted) by small cadres of superhuman warriors trained in either of two martial-arts: the North Star, which, if I have this correct, allows the fighter to "drive his life-energy into his attacker, shocking them from within," or the South Star, which seems to rely more on pressure points. A prophecy has declared that harmony will only exist when the exemplars of the North Star and the South Star get along. The kicker, also according to prophecy: they will always oppose one another, which is the crux of the windy plot.

FIST OF THE NORTH STAR follows the North Star champion, Kenshiro, as he treks across the feudal, post-nuclear wasteland searching for his lost love, Yulia, who

was abducted by the dastardly Shin, Ken's former friend and the Fist of the South Star. Shin is building the Empire of The Bloody Cross, and wants the reluctant Yulia as his consort. Through his journeys, Kenshiro must fight for the various, beleaguered remnants of civilization — those embattled townships trying to build a better tomorrow — while smashing the various minions of Shin (your standard, Mohawked, Miller thugs), who are led by grotesque sadists with colorful, playing-card sobriquets like Club, Diamond, Joker

where close to being rocket scientists, they predictably decline the offer. And hoo-boy, that's when the fun starts: whenever Ken swings into action, the cell freezes while the narrator's voice gruffly blurts out the coming bit of devastating North Star fisticuffs, say, "THE NORTH STAR FIST OF REMAINING REGRETS," helpfully accompanied by Japanese kanji at the bottom of the screen. Sometimes a timer even appears at the bottom of the frame, ticking off the seconds of life remaining to the soon-to-be-deceased bad-die. It's usually at this time



DIAL 1-800-KNUCKLES: Muscle-bound, testosterone-crazed bully boys making your life a living Hell? Ask Kenshiro for help. Just don't expect a long conversation.

and Heart. Ken is joined on his journey by an obnoxious-chirpy survival-brat, Bart, and a pure-hearted little girl named Linn, who has a crush on him.

For the most part, tedium reigns as Ken basically smashes one faceless gang of thugs after another, prefacing each bout of gore with a terse, and fairly mild warning: "Run away," or "Just leave." Since none of his enemies (except Shin) are any-

that the fairly laconic Ken will tell the pond-scum sadist-in-question exactly **WHAT** the delivered blow will do to him, and how much time he has left. The campiness of all this extreme gore is somewhat defused by the animators' hypocritical, visual white-washing of blood when Shin's henchmen explode: since the fluid in question has a white, milky hue, the Freudian implications are pretty staggering.

Though the crude, Saturday-morning animation is flat, stodgy, and dated by today's standards (Ken's basically an immobile Stallone cut-out, while Shin's a blonde, Axl Rose type), there is a point to all the over-stated Wagnerian grue. **FIST** makes the admirable case that those who pursue a wanton existence of violence and self-gratification can only be stopped by the very violence that they engender, and that the exercise of power without spiritual enlightenment (a point made in later episodes when Ken's selfless quest is paralleled by that of brother Raoh) is nothing more than nihilistic hubris. In **FIST**, Ashida provides broad (but effective) symbolism, contrasting the depredations of Shin's reivers with a villager's struggling rice shoots, or a wounded civilian's hoarded seeds. The essential conflict is between those selfless souls who are fighting to preserve the remnants of civilization, and those who are profiting from the general anarchy. Despite its many flaws, there's an irresistible grandeur to it all: even Kenshiro (and Shin) voice personal philosophies, no matter how diametrically opposed, and there's the occasionally effective, Spartan image of horror or grotesquerie, such as a gross, Felliniesque giant who can't abide the sight of his own blood. Manga Entertainment has done a fine job in packaging the series. Having previously only seen the cobbled-together, and frequently confusing OVA, I would certainly watch the remaining episodes, just to find out how much clarity and character wound up being pruned from the previous effort in the interests of rushing to the next brain-busting punch. **AFQ**

QUEEN EMERALDAS

ADV Films; English dub reviewed.

Original Story: Leiji Matsumoto; Director: Yuji Asada; Production: Fuetto Kikuchi, Akira Tsuburaya; Character Design and Director of Animation: Keisuke Masunaga; Mechanical Designs: Katsumi Itabashi; Director of Mechanical Animation: Masato Sawada; Music: Michiru Oshima

You can always tell when you're watching a Leiji Matsumoto anime — just look at the women. No big, jiggling breasts, no revealing outfits, no squeaky voices. Matsumoto's heroines are slim, willowy creatures with knee-length hair, soulful voices, and stylishly modest outfits. They travel the galaxy in steam locomotives or impractical, but gorgeous, baroque spaceships. They are mysterious, unattainable, and morally ambiguous. And, every now and then, they kick major butt.

A case in point is Emeraldas, a "free trader" who wanders the galaxy alone, mourning her lost love and striking the occasional blow for freedom and justice. Emeraldas is the female counterpart of Matsumoto's most famous creation: space pirate Captain Harlock. She wears a similar uniform with a skull-and-crossbones insignia, carries a similar laser-shooting sword, and even — depending on which movie or series you're watching — has a similar-looking scar on her face (though she's managed to keep both her eyes so far).

Over the years, Emeraldas has appeared as a supporting character in assorted Matsumoto projects, including the SPACE PIRATE CAPTAIN HARLOCK TV series and the GALAXY EX-

PRESS 999 TV series and movies. The details of her life-story can be hard to untangle from the morass of conflicting timelines that make up Matsumoto's universe, but a few points remain constant. She is a loner, traveling in a mechanized ship with no human (or even humanoid) crew, destined to wander the sea of stars for all her life. Her ship is the Queen Emeraldas. Her lover is Tochio, Harlock's brilliant engineer. She owns one of four Tochio-designed laser-pistols, the most powerful handguns in the known universe. And, with or without the gun, she can wipe the floor with pretty much anyone.

In 1978, Matsumoto published several issues of *Queen Emeraldas* manga series, but the project was never completed. Matsumoto becoming increasingly involved with various film and TV projects. In 1998, he resurrected the story as a two-episode OAV series, which is now being released in the U.S. by ADV Films.

The plot of the series centers not as much on Emeraldas herself as on Hiroshi Umino, a determinedly anti-social kid who stows away on a spaceship bound for a colony where he hopes to mine for energy crystals and eventually build his own spacecraft. En route, the ship is attacked by the Arfress, alien invaders led by Fleet Commander Eldomain. Emeraldas intervenes, though not for any altruistic motive — she is offended because Eldomain has decorated his ship with skull-and-crossbones insignia. Only Harlock and herself, she declares, are allowed to display that design. Thoroughly humiliated by his defeat, Eldomain attempts to draw Emeraldas into a trap by holding a group of civilians (including Hiroshi) hostage. This leads to a truly spectacular space battle, as well as a one-on-one confrontation between



Emeraldas and the Arfress queen.

This is not Matsumoto's best work. The story is a patchwork of familiar elements; everything reminded me of something I saw in Matsumoto's previous projects. There's the outwardly hostile but inwardly hurting young protagonist who learns a valuable life-lesson in the course of the story; a planet that looks like the set of an old Hollywood movie — in this case a western; the motley crew of colorful supporting characters who band around the hero; the arrogant aliens bent on conquering humanity; and the obligatory Harlock cameo. Of course, the repetition of these elements is what forms much of the appeal of Matsumoto's work. I'd miss them if they weren't there, but in this case, there isn't much else. The story really needed more than two episodes to be told properly. As it is, it feels compressed, sketchy in places where I really wished for more details.

This is also the first Matsumoto project to make extensive use of computer graphics. Most of the ship

designs were computer-generated, and their artificial smoothness does not blend well with the other visuals, though the STAR WARS-style opening shot panning across the Queen Emeraldas was rather impressive. Matsumoto's hybrid spaceships just seem more suited to hand-drawn animation.

In the end, though, none of this really matters, because Emeraldas, like Harlock, generates an aura of cool that renders story details and animation nit-picks pretty much irrelevant. When she stands tall with her cloak and hair blowing in the wind (and there's always a convenient wind blowing in the right direction), she looks as if she's about to slay her enemies through sheer panache — they will all drop dead of a massive inferiority complex.

While Matsumoto's previous couple of projects have met with disappointing receptions, the QUEEN EMERALDAS series has sold well enough that more episodes are supposed to be in the works.

I'm there.

AF4

Marina Frants

SINK OR SWING: A TALE OF TWO KINGS

This KING AND I is abysmal; it looks cheap, despite the \$60 million budget, and the story has been drastically altered in order to market it to a target audience of toddlers and pre-schoolers. Representatives of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization have stated in interviews that their goal was primarily to attract an audience of the youngest children. Ironically, with its altered plot, slapsticky gags, and cutesy animals, THE KING AND I is unrecognizable to musical theater fans and merely dull and predictable to everyone else — including children.

The basic premise remains: in 1862, a widowed Englishwoman, Anna Leowowens (speaking voice

Miranda Richardson; singing voice, Christianne Noll), arrives in Bangkok with her son Louis to take up the position of teacher to the children of the King of Siam. After that, virtually everything is changed, and for the worse. The King's Prime Minister, the Kralahome, has been transformed into a British-accented, psychopathic villain. He's been given an allegedly "comic" sidekick, an odious, squat ball of a man called Master Little, who speaks in an offensively thick Asian accent (and why do Master Little and the Kralahome speak with different accents, anyway?). The character of Lun Tha, the lover of the King's Burmese concubine Tuptim, has been eliminated; Tuptim now falls in love with the

King's hunky son, the Crown Prince Chulalongkorn (as improbable as that sounds). Slavery is no longer the issue that causes the breakdown between the King and Anna; it's not

an issue at all, in fact. Too disturbing for three-year-olds, presumably.

Anna is a mere glimmer of her feisty, righteous self; and the King is mostly an impotent, comic figure until the plot requires him to go all action hero and chase down a run-away Tuptim and Chulalongkorn in a hot-air balloon. Even on its own terms, THE KING AND I is a poor film. The animation although colorful, is flat. The editing is MTV-frenetic. The addition of charmless animal sidekicks — a monkey, a black panther, and a



white, baby elephant — doesn't help. Just as distressing as the additions are the omissions, in particular the *Small House of Uncle Thomas* ballet, which could have been a golden opportunity to let the animators shine. Sorry, not here.

The only reason for this new version is to extract dollars from the parents of the youngest of children. Do yourself a favor: buy the 1956, live-action video, sit down with your kid, and luxuriate in the real thing. Accept no substitutes. **AFA**

Paula Vitaris

THE KING AND I

Directed by Richard Rich; Morgan Creek; 87 mins. Voices: Miranda Richardson; Christianne Noll; Martin Vidnovic; Ian Richardson; Darrell Hammond; Allen D. Hong.

TARZAN

Directed by Chris Buck and Kevin Lima; Disney; 88 mins. Voices: Tony Goldwyn; Minnie Driver; Glenn Close; Lance Henriksen; Brian Blessed; Rosie O'Donnell; Phillip Proctor.

What we see here is the beginning of the breakdown of the Disney formula. For a while, we've been wondering how the Walt Disney Company was going to respond to PRINCE OF EGYPT. While the DreamWorks film had its faults, it was technically flawless, had decent music, and managed to hold the audience's attention. To really fight back, Disney would have to produce something on the milestone level of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST or ALADDIN. TARZAN is all that, and more.

Unlike any of the other animated "masterpieces" of the decade, TARZAN actually stays close to the original book. Yeah, there is that contractual-obligation, *Trash-ing the Camp* sequence (which sticks out like a sore

thumb), but except for that, there are *no* production numbers at all. In other words, the stock-Menken musical structure is gone, and the filmmakers concentrate on the twin tasks of making a character-based story and a thrill-ride.

The latter begins almost immediately, with the gorilla Kala (sketched by Russ Edmonds and voiced by Glenn Close) investigating the Greystoke's treehouse, discovering the parents dead and baby Tarzan (John Ripa and Alex D. Linz) under a pile of clothes. The crosscutting and sense of speed as Kala tries to escape from the still-present leopard (sketched by Dominique Monfery) with the little tyke in tow bring a real tension to the sequence that we really haven't seen before in a Dis-

ney animated project.

The treatment of the characters is not as advanced. There is conflict between our hero and the tribe's silverback, Kerchak (Bruce Smith and Lance Henriksen), who has little tolerance (justified, it will turn out) for humans. The sidekick issue remains — Terk (Mike Surrey and Rosie O'Donnell) actually begins as more of a mentor than anything else; the elephant Tantor (Sergio Pablos and Wayne Knight) doesn't really fit at all. But this is one of the film's few flaws.

The rest is magnificent.

The sequence where Tarzan (Glen Keane and Tony Goldwyn) rescues Jane (Ken Duncan and Minnie Driver) from a pack of baboons is as much a rush as anything in THE PHANTOM MENACE. When we're watching a

scene from Tarzan's viewpoint, he speaks English to his tribe-mates; when we're with Jane, the dialogue is heard as a series of simian grunts. The effect is seamless. In fact, it's the best handling of the "funny animal" problem I've ever seen.

It's clear that Disney wanted to prove something with TARZAN. Their success is a credit to directors Chris Buck and Kevin Lima, as well as to the rest of the production staff. TARZAN is not only fine, Disney entertainment, it's one of the best films of the summer. **AFA**

Eric Lurio



BLACK JACK

Manga; 90 mins.

Director: Osamu Dezaki;
Original Author: Osamu Tezuka; **Screenplay:** Eto More and Osamu Dezaki.

Tezuka's great manga gets the feature-length treatment in this above-average Dezaki feature. Dr. Black Jack is a maverick doctor who can't be bothered to achieve certification in all the medical areas that he excels in, and so works outside the system. When medical centers are desperate (and willing to pay his million-dollar fee), he comes to their aid. He travels with Pinoki, a girl who was assembled Frankenstein-style after being absorbed by her twin sister (it is Black Jack, however, who carries a scar across his face).

In this feature, a group of nobodies with below-average talents have started performing at skill levels far beyond their previous capabilities, fueling concern that a new kind of superhuman has been born. However, the superhumans are now falling ill and dying, victims of "Moirai's disease," an affliction which causes organs to age incredibly rapidly and then fail. Summoned by Dr. Jo Carol, Black Jack agrees to take the case, soon discovering that the non-profit foundation providing care for the superhumans is actually controlled by a single company who ordered the creation of the virus Endorph A, which develops advanced aptitudes in human beings. Although they only infected some 153 subjects, there now exist some 1200 superhumans, indicating that the virus is contagious. To coerce Black Jack's cooperation, Dr. Carol arranges for Pinoki to be kidnapped, and infects Black Jack and herself with the disease, in hopes that, with the doctor's already astounding medical



BLACK JACK

abilities greatly magnified, he will find a cure before it is too late.

Dezaki once more provides a flashy style — sometimes employing freeze frames to emphasize a particularly dramatic moment — and effectively conveys the extremes that his characters will go to in order to pursue their goals, as well as the consequences of their actions. An adventure with some moral meat on the bone, **BLACK JACK** deserves kudos as a gripping and unusual science fiction medical drama.

Dennis Fischer

GALAXY FRAULEIN YUNA RETURNS: FAIRY OF THE DEEP DARKNESS

ADV Video; 90 mins.

Director: Akiyuki Shinbo;
Script: Sumio Uetake.

Yuna is sort of an intergalactic Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Teenaged, blonde, and pretty, Yuna attends high school, but takes time off to sally forth into the heavens to save the universe from total annihilation by the forces of evil. In this film the fate of humankind is threatened by three fiendish sisters, one of whom, Ayako, is brought over to the side of good by

Yuna's offering of love and friendship.

Yuna's sweetness even in the face of unrelenting wickedness is quite engaging, and makes for an ending that is both poignant and hopeful. It is *getting* to the end of this English-dubbed film that is the hard part. The verbal exchanges are handled principally by Yuna and her best friend, an android named Yuri. Cynthia Martinez, who voices Yuna, and Tamara Lo, who plays Yuri, somehow feel it is necessary to give dramatic import to their lines by screaming them. On top of this, the two women affect such irritating, shrill voices that listening to Yuri and Yuna converse is like trying to sit through a ninety-minute concert of off-key boatswain's whistles.

If you really want to enjoy this picture, turn off the volume on your TV and just let the seductive color and animation carry you through.

Mitch Persons

EAT-MAN

AnimeVillage.com; 48 mins.

Director: Kouichi Mashimo;
Original Story: Akihito Yoshitomi; **Screenplay:** Aya Matsui and Atsuhiko Tomio-

ka.

In the universe of world-striding, iconoclastic adventurers, Bolt Crank certainly stands alone. There's that name, for one thing. Then there's the guy himself: he eats metal, spontaneously generates weapons from a pair of pads in his hands, and is so laconic he makes Clint Eastwood look like Richard Simmons. Add in the fact that he regularly executes the clients who hire him — based, of course, on his own, highly-developed sense of justice — and you've got one weird hero in one equally peculiar series.

Which can make getting into these episodes a bit of a trial at first; it's almost too much weirdness to handle at once. Fortunately, the art and animation is stylish, and the storylines, when they're at their best (such as the relatively laid-back episodes on tape 3), dole out nice portions of drama and enigma. I wouldn't necessarily trust Bolt Crank with an assignment, but I'll gladly follow where he's leading.

Dan Persons

KNIGHTS OF RAMUNE

Software Sculptors;
60 mins.

Director: Yoshitaka Fujimoto;

Script: Katsumi Hasegawa.

KNIGHTS OF RAMUNE is a *very* silly title. First, while not mentioned on the box, it is a sequel to **NG KNIGHTS LAMUNE** — which explains why it opens with the title, "Three Years Later." Second, it is 93% Fan Service (bouncing bosoms, shower shots, and underwear shots) and only about 7% adventure. What's more, the bosoms on these girls have to be among the biggest to bounce in *any* anime.

Holy virgin Cacao and her friend, holy virgin candidate Parfait are sworn to

Thank you for the article on MONONOKE HIME (PRINCESS MONONOKE, 1:3:24). It's nice to see a well-researched and well-written article on one of the greats of animation. However, I did spot a few errors. The watercolor manga referred to is called *Shura no Tabi*, not *Shuna*. And the real reason that NADIA OF THE MYSTERIOUS SEAS bears a resemblance to Miyazaki's work is because Miyazaki came up with a TV show idea in the '70s based on *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. That project fell through, but he took elements from it to create FUTURE BOY CONAN and LAPUTA, while the television company later approached Gainax in the '80s about doing a show based on the premise.

I also have to disagree with the comparison of GATCHAMAN's violence to today's anime (BATTLE OF THE PLANETS, 1:3:52). I don't know if impalements and broken teeth flying in the air have ever been considered tame! It may not look as slick, but it is pretty strong in some episodes.

And, finally, a comment about anime fans not liking American animation. If the writer (Letters, 1:3:61) meant Disney-style animation, then I am in agreement. However, my favorite television show is THE SIMPSONS, and when I was younger I loved Looney Tunes and the Fleischer's SUPERMAN. I have no problem with you guys devoting pages to other "styles," as long as I continue to get more than halfway decent stuff on anime (frankly, the real reason I buy your mag). Keep up the good work!

Aaron Kristoffer Dawe
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ON THE SCREEN

protect the warrior Ramune in all his guises. (Apparently, these Ramune guys reincarnate or something. It is not explained.) In the first episode of KNIGHTS OF RAMUNE, the girls are sent to protect the fourth warrior Ramune. However, instead of a noble and knightly guy, this Ramune turns out to be a villain bent on world domination, the kind of guy who kicks his women henchmen and steps on their heads. The two holy virgins are horrified by this turn of events and find themselves questioning their very principles. Complete with much breast grabbing, henchmen named after drinks, and some girl-on-girl kissing.

L. Jagi Lamplighter

THE COMPLETE PRIVATE SNAFU Bosko Video

Directors: Chuck Jones; Friz Freleng; Frank Tashlin; Bob Clampett; Scripts: Ted Geisel.

Long thought lost or available only on bootleg tapes, a complete collection of Private Snafu cartoons is finally available on DVD from Bosko Video. These cartoons were produced in 1943, when Col. Frank Capra was placed in charge of the Armed Forces Motion Picture Unit and told to come up with an idea for informational entertainment films to be shown to all branches of the Armed Services. Capra, who later used animation on his episodes of the BELL SCIENCE SERIES, created the character of Private Snafu (named after the army acronym for — to put it delicately — the phrase, "Situation Normal: All Fouled Up"), and placed Ted Geisel (better known as Dr. Seuss) in charge of the animation branch. Art Heineman designed the character, and



RAMUNE

Geisel shopped the concept around to see who would make four-minute contributions to the Armed Forces' bi-weekly newsreels.

When Leon Schlesinger's bid came in at about a third of Disney's (and Disney demanded exclusive ownership of the character and merchandising rights), Capra went with Warners. Chuck Jones developed the character and then farmed it out to Warners' regular directors, with Friz Freleng directing eight Snafu cartoons, Jones taking eleven, Frank Tashlin helming four, and the irrepressible Bob Clampett coming up with two. In addition, animators who had broken away from Disney to form United Productions of America, better known as UPA, used the Snafu character in two "A Few Quick Facts" cartoons, which are also included.

Since the Snafus themselves lack credits, Bosko has thoughtfully superimposed each director's name at the beginning of the cartoon. Each cartoon is presented windowboxed, but the framing appears too tight, omitting picture information along the periphery. Additionally, to discourage bootlegging, Bosko has superimposed their logo over sections

of each cartoon, partially obscuring the image.

Nevertheless, it is a delight to have an easily accessible, complete set of these inventive war-time propaganda cartoons in the very handy DVD format. Just be forewarned: they're anything but politically correct, containing racial caricatures, mild profanity, some sexually suggestive imagery, and humor aimed directly at the hearts and minds of America's fighting men (such as the regular appearance of Snafu's helpmeet, the Fairy God-Sergeant, a.k.a. Technical Fairy First Class). The purpose of the cartoons was largely to remind soldiers not to reveal troop movements to anyone, to avoid contracting malaria, and not to listen to morale-defeating rumors. Some of the cartoons are highly inventive, such as the Superman parody "Snafu-superman," or the "loose-lips" cautionary tale, "Spies" (done in Seuss-like rhyme, with one priceless shot revealing a beautiful, female Nazi to have gazonga-sized microphones planted over her gazonga-sized gazongas). No fan of classic Warners animation will want to be without these exceptionally rare, but lively, cartoons.

Dennis Fischer

OUT OF JAPAN

AL BUNDY, MOVE OVER: HERE COME THE YAMADAS

MIWA
HIRAI

Despite a \$20 million production cost, Studio Ghibli's 1997 feature, *MONONOKE HIME* was a great success at the Japanese box-office. The film made more than 18 billion yen, becoming one of the top two movies in the country (*TITANIC* took first place). It also triggered the production of Ghibli's new film, *YAMADAS*.

YAMADAS was originally a four-frame comic strip entitled *My Neighbors The Yamadas*. The strip — by Hisaichi Ishii, a comic creator treasured in Japan for his cynical, politically-charged work — ran daily in the *Asahi National Newspaper*. Born on September 2, 1951 in Okayama prefecture, Ishii published *Oh! Baito-kun* (*Oh! Part-Time Workers*) with fellow artists in 1974 at his own expense. After graduating from college, Ishii continued creating four-frame comic strips in various publications. He won the 31st Bungei-Syunju Manga Awards in 1985. *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (now titled *Nono-chan*) is still read avidly by readers of all generations. In addition, Ishii also draws manga and contributes to newspapers and magazines.

YAMADAS is about three generations of a family living together in one house. What Ishii strives to do in his comics is bring out the details of their everyday lives, things that people have in common and can relate to. Toshio Suzuki, the producer of *YAMADAS*, was a big fan of the comic. He had been wanting to animate it for years, but there was almost no precedent for adapting a four-frame comic strip to the cinema. Nevertheless, a treatment and storyline were written, and the rest is history.

Ghibli, a studio that had previously produced animated films based on original work, was not interested in the project at first. But Ghibli had to admit that *My Neighbors the Yamadas* was an outstanding creation. Indeed, *YAMADAS*, the film, is unique. Unlike Ghibli's former animations, the creation of *YAMADAS* demanded a vivid movement of form characteristic of four-frame comics. Ghibli wanted to keep the tempo and rhythm of the comic without losing the distinctive feel of the Yamadas' lifestyle.

What lifestyle? In Japan it's called *shomin*: ordinary people. The Yamadas are rash, apathetic, slovenly and idle. They only do what they really want to do. Father Takashi, ostensibly the pillar of the family, gets no respect. All he wants to do is go to the Pachinko parlor or take a nap. Mother Matsuko eats everything she can get her hands on and lies around watching TV. Grandmother Shige, who fancies that she is the boss in the family, is a sarcastic matriarch who never shuts up. Eldest son Noboru is...well...a nothing.

Nonoko is the eldest daughter, a lovable, innocent glutton. And don't forget Pochi, the family dog, who rarely moves at all unless it's to bite someone.

Like a group of uninhibited children, the Yamadas only do what's easy and fun. They are not Super Family, yet no matter what they do, it's hard to hate them. Their message is: "Take things lightly," a valuable lesson in these complicated days.

Their style of life is quite valued in Japan right now. Struggling through a long-term economic depression, rocked by world events and the tense relations between warring nations, the Japanese people have begun to falter. They worry about the future, about getting left behind, about the world going crazy. Through the Yamadas, people find relief. The uncomplicated family illustrates the pleasures of daily life.

Ghibli chose Kansai-ben (a dialect of Osaka and Western Japan) to be spoken in the movie. The popular image of Kansai people portray them to be powerful, energetic and easy-going, and

their dialectal speech patterns fit the Yamadas perfectly. Isao Takahata (*POM POKO*) wrote and directed the screenplay. He is one of the lead directors of Ghibli, as is Hayao Miyazaki. Takahata also directed *THE GRAVE OF FIREFLIES* ('88), *ONLY YESTERDAY*, ('91) and *POM POKO* ('94).

Takahata has always sought new ideas for the development of animation. *YAMADAS'* drawing style is innovative, with entire scenes constructed by CG (computer graphics). CG was already employed for several sequences in *MONONOKE HIME*, but this is Ghibli's first try at creating a movie with CG technology only. The delicate touches of pastel and watercolor would not be possible otherwise.

Takahata adopted the idea of doing voice sessions before drawing cels to maximize the actor's abilities. Takahata wanted his actors to interact naturally, as if they were playing real people, not simply doing voice-overs. Composer Akiko Yano, who now resides in New York, scored the film. This is her first time composing an original film soundtrack.

In Japan, *MONONOKE HIME* broke the box-office record of Steven Spielberg's *THE LOST WORLD*. This year, the President of Tokuma International stated with confidence that he expected *YAMADAS* to give *STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE* a run for its money.

Said Takahata, "*YAMADAS* is a compilation of our past work. The budget was \$15 million. Another significant thing is that this is the first foreign animation movie Disney has invested in."

YAMADAS premiered at 263 theatres in Japan on July 17, 1999. APF

A BRUSH WITH REALITY: Those familiar with Studio Ghibli's lush animation style may be startled by *THE YAMADAS'* more stylized look, directly inspired by Hisaichi Ishii's artwork



MEET THE MIKO: SHINTO IN ANIME (PART II)

RUSSELL J.
HANDELMAN

Just as Shinto permeates everyday life in Japan, its rites, beliefs and images can be found throughout anime. Whether in the inclusion of actual Shintoist practices or physical artifacts, or in the more subtle use of Shintoist themes, producers of anime have been able to create effective stories and characters using a rich ethnic vocabulary immediately recognizable to Japanese audiences, a vocabulary by which they can evoke emotional resonances based on millennia of shared beliefs. It is a measure of their artistry that international audiences have found great humor, drama and emotional impact in anime without being a part of this system of beliefs.

Shinto practices today, as outlined in our previous installment, are the manifestation of centuries of evolution. Shinto has been highly syncretic, adopting and adapting the rites, observances and philosophies of other faiths for nearly 2,000 years. Early on, Shinto took on the Chinese beliefs of Confucianism, with its orderly hierarchy of familial and community relationships, Taoism, with its emphasis on divination, and Buddhism. The Buddhist bodhisattva — spiritual beings who help others attain enlightenment (*bosatsu* in Japan) — were presented to the Japanese as divine beings whose earthly avatars were the *kami*. Buddhist statues appeared in Shinto shrines, often being considered *shintai* (an object in which the *kami* resides), and Buddhist temples often had shrines on their grounds. Buddhism also offered a view of the afterlife that provided the Japanese with more meaningful funerary rites than Shinto — being more concerned with

the natural world — had offered.

During the period following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Shinto was seen by the new rulers of Japan as a potentially valuable force in developing a modern sense of nationalism, and in developing greater loyalty to the newly empowered Emperor. The government ended its support of Buddhism and discouraged Buddhist rites. A new form of Shinto was created, focussing on paying homage to the Emperor as a living *kami*. This form of Shinto was declared to be not a religion, but a form of

One of the more visible manifestations of Shinto in anime is the character of the *miko*, a term generally defined as “priestess,” “sorceress” or “shrine-maiden.” *Miko* in modern-day Shinto are young women who assist at Shinto shrines and festivals. Clad in the *chihaya* (white blouse) and *hibakama* (red skirt) derived from Heian Era (seventh Century) court dress, they are often seen at shrines selling fortunes or amulets, aiding the male clergy (of which there are many ranks) in ceremonies, or performing sacred dances at festivals. *Miko* can be traced back to a long tradi-

WWII, *miko* returned to the shrines in a role akin to acolytes.

Miko in anime often display the supernatural abilities attributed to their ancestors. Characters such as Sakura in URUSEI YATSURA and Rei (Raye)/Sailor Mars in SAILOR MOON exhibit psychic powers in various degrees. Sakura, often shown as sensitive to the presence of paranormal phenomena, is frequently seen using a *harae-gushi* (wooden wand with zigzag paper streamers attached) to attempt to exorcise evil. At the same time, she is not treated with great respect, as her abilities are haphazard; more often than not, she makes things worse, to great comedic effect, or seems to succeed only by accident.

Rei (Raye)/Sailor Mars manifests the ability of having premonitory dreams as well as generally sensing evil. Like many *miko* she lives at a shrine and her performances of rituals there are a good example of Shinto's syncretism: she is frequently depicted undertaking divination by fire derived from *goma* Buddhism while moving through the *inzo* hand gestures and reciting the *kuji*, a nine-syllable magic incantation of Taoist origin. When confronted by a some suspected evil force, she occasionally resorts to the use of *o-fuda*, incantations written on slips of rice-paper. Likewise, one of her attacking powers as Sailor Mars is Buddhist-derived — she surrounds herself with flaming disks by calling out “Burning Mandala!”

We've now seen the how and the who of Shinto. In our next installment, we'll look at the why, and see how it has a profound effect on even the most secular topics in anime.

APA



REI OF THE MOON: Seen daily on the Cartoon Network, SAILOR MOON's Sailor Mars (on the left, there) manifests powers mirroring those traditionally attributed to *mikos*, the calling that alter ego Rei pursues during her off-hours.

civic obligation, as a means of circumventing the new Japanese constitution's provisions for freedom of religion. Retroactively named “State Shinto” by the American occupiers of Japan after World War II, this form of Shinto was abolished after 1945 when the Showa emperor renounced his divinity. Shinto today is not supported by the Japanese government and is self-regulated by an association encompassing the vast majority of shrines.

tion of female shamans who would practice divination by going into trances and prophesizing while performing ritual dances. Once figures of great esteem, *miko* gradually lost status until, during the “State Shinto” period, they were effectively suppressed by the government on the grounds that their wild dancing and oracular pronouncements were embarrassing to foreigners (and, probably, because they were difficult for the state to control). Following



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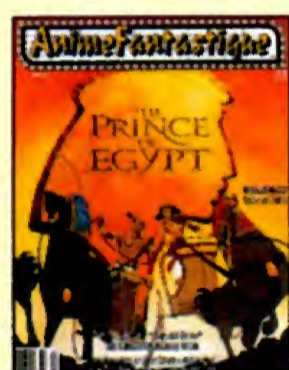
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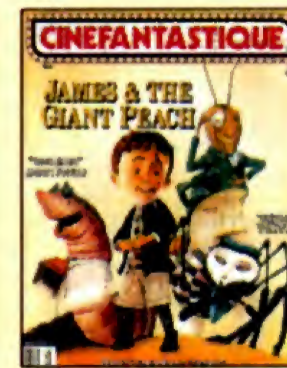
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